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BUDDHISM AND
CHRISTIANITY IN THE
LIGHT OF HINDUISM



Buddhism and Christianity in the light of Hinduism

ARTHUR OSBORNE

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It has come to be a sort of declaration of faith to write pronouns referring to Christ with capital letters and a sign of disbelief to refuse to do so. If any such courtesy were used in this book it would be necessary, as the text will show, to extend it equally to Buddha after his Enlightenment and to Rama and Krishna, also to Sri Ramana Maharshi. I have therefore simplified matters by reverting to the older, Biblical usage of small letters. This is not a sign of disbelief in Christ's divine state.

ARTHUR OSBORNE



Contents

1	Complementary Religions	9
2	Hindu Viewpoints	39
3	The Thesis	73
4	Buddhism and Hinduism	94
5	Christianity and Buddhism	117
	<i>Epilogue</i>	145
	<i>Glossary</i>	157
	<i>Index</i>	161

I

Complementary Religions

THERE is a complementarism between Buddhism and Christianity which appears in some ways as similarity and in others as direct opposition. Certainly they are not in all respects alike. Buddhism is more akin in its basic doctrinal outlook to Taoism, while Christianity has more doctrinal affinity with the other two religions of the Semitic, monotheistic group, Judaism and Islam; nevertheless a remarkable parallel exists. The purpose of this book is to examine and explain it. The first chapter will cover only its more superficial aspects, leaving its fundamental doctrinal basis to be dealt with later.

In the first place, both religions are based on the teachings of a founder revered as divine. This is often taken for granted by their followers as a natural condition for a religion, but it does not apply, for instance, to Judaism or Hinduism, which have no single founder, or even to Islam or the Chinese religions, which have. It is expressly asserted in the Quran that Mohammad was a man like any other, to whom a message had been revealed. Lao Tsu and Confucius are revered as Sages and Moses as a Prophet, but that is not the same as a Christ or a Buddha. Hinduism has a doctrine of Divine Incarnations, but these were not its founders; they merely reiterated the *sanatana dharma*, the 'eternal doctrine' which existed already before their appearance on earth. The position of Christ and Buddha as founders of religions is different. In the first place, neither word is a name; both are

titles and should therefore correctly be used with the definite article. 'Christ' is the Greek rendering of the Hebrew 'Messiah', the 'Anointed' who had been foretold and long awaited, while the Buddha is the incarnation of *budhi*, the Sanskrit word for divine, intuitional intellect, the intermediary between Absolute Truth and man's mind, and therefore fundamentally the same as the Word or Logos which descends from God to man, from Absolute Being to limited and reflected being. Incidentally, the word *budhi* is sometimes translated as 'mind' or 'reason', but this gives a false impression; the mentality or reason is *manas*.

There is also a remarkable parallel in the two life stories, starting from the birth and early life and the apotheosis of the Mother. This, of course, never implies identity, and the differences are no less significant than the similarities, reflecting as they do the profounder differences of doctrinal approach. Before commenting on the life stories, however, it may be well to anticipate two criticisms that are commonly made: one that these stories are not proven and are probably to a large extent mythological, and the other, rather similar, that such birth and childhood stories normally grow up around the founder of any religion and are therefore not to be taken seriously.

The Gospels have by now withstood such sustained and minute examination and the accuracy of such statements as can be checked against independent evidence has been so generally confirmed that their reliability cannot well be contested. To discard those statements for which there can be no independent evidence while perforce accepting those for which there can would be partisan in the extreme. On the other hand, to verify the life stories of the Buddha is much more difficult owing to the lack of historical interest that prevailed in ancient India and the paucity of material against which to check them. The ancient Hindus were singularly indifferent to historical records, and in preserving an account of the life of the Buddha his followers were

embarking on a new type of venture. This in itself shows the enormous importance attached by them to his life story. Since, however, some of the accounts contain a fair sprinkling of the miraculous, there have been critics who have represented them as altogether unreliable. This is not justified. Their background of social history, which is a good gauge of accuracy, tallies with that of other ancient Indian sources such as Kautilya and Manu and the Upanishads, while some of the miraculous episodes can be understood symbolically. For instance, the Buddha's taking seven steps as soon as he was born is held by some Buddhist commentators to refer to his path covering the seven heavens or seven stages of realization. It is stated that on the whole the Buddha disapproved of miracles and forbade his followers to perform them on the ground that there is no real edification in them. A person should be convinced at heart and not merely overawed by the sight of wonders. One important consideration in support of the traditional life story is that some two-and-a-half centuries after the death of the Buddha, in the time of the Emperor Ashoka, Buddhist teaching already bore the form that it does now and the four cardinal points in the life of the Buddha, the places of his birth, Enlightenment, first teaching and death, were already universally recognized places of pilgrimage. If one considers that he established monasteries and an Order during his lifetime, that some of his contemporaries would have survived him there by at least half a century, that they were persons who had renounced the world in quest of Truth, and that handing down a truthful account of their Master would be a sacred obligation for them, it seems quite unrealistic to suggest that within another two centuries the true story should have been forgotten and distorted into a false one.

This brings us to the other criticism mentioned: that such stories grow up naturally round the founder of any religion. Such a criticism is glib and needs to be mentioned only because it is frequently made. No comparable stories have

grown up around Moses or Mohammad or Lao Tzu or Confucius or around Rama, and with none of them is there the apotheosis of the Mother. Miraculous stories are told about Krishna, it is true, but they are markedly different from those about Christ and Buddha. It is said that his mother was confined in a dungeon by her brother, who was a king, all her children being condemned to be killed at birth owing to a prophecy that one of them would kill him and seize his throne, and that the child Krishna was miraculously transported to a safe place whence he later returned to free his captive parents. Just as the birth of the Christ-child in a cave at the darkest hour, the teaching, the crucifixion and the resurrection all have a symbolism of which the Christian mystic is well aware, so in other religions also there is a symbolism of events. In the Krishna story the mother is to be regarded as human nature imprisoned in the darkness of spiritual ignorance, all her dreams and aspirations foredoomed to death until the Divine Illumination comes to life in her and sets her free. Incidentally, to say that a story is symbolical does not mean that it is not literally true also, as was the Christ story. On the contrary, events have a meaning and an inevitability if properly deciphered.

This by the way. To return to Buddhism and Christianity: there is no story of virgin birth in Buddhism. The paternity of King Suddhodana is never questioned. Also there is no such tradition as that common to Christianity and Islam that Christ was Enlightened from birth, that is to say, in the language of Christian theology, was born free from original sin. There were many indications that the child Siddhartha was to become a Buddha, but he had to do so through his own efforts; he was not born one. This difference is an appropriate physical reflection of the different types of doctrine proclaimed, which will be examined in a later chapter: the devotional path of worship which Christ enunciated required to be focused on a Divine Teacher who was inherently and by birth One with the

Father, whereas the path of Liberation taught by Buddha required the example of a Master who could break through the web of illusion into the Reality of Nirvana, even as he inspired his disciples to do.

The annunciation of the child Christ to Mary is, however, paralleled by the dream of Queen Maya at the beginning of her pregnancy. She was transported to a celestial abode where a white elephant approached her and, touching her right side with its trunk, dissolved into a vapour and entered her womb. This dream was interpreted to mean that the child would become a universal monarch unless he renounced the world, in which case he would become a Buddha. The alternatives offered recall the similar choice offered to Christ during the temptation in the wilderness and to Buddha himself during the final night of temptation by Mara, the Evil One, before he broke through from illusion to Enlightenment. More will be said of this choice and its implications later. It serves incidentally to remind us that, just as Christ was born of the royal tribe of Judah and not the priestly tribe of Levi, so was Buddha born of the Kshatriya and not the Brahmin caste, that is of a royal and not a priestly family. Actually, however, this apparent anomaly is shared also by the Seventh and Eighth Divine Incarnations of Hinduism, Rama and Krishna, to whom reference will be made later, both of whom were heirs to ruling families.

The apotheosis of the Mother is a marked feature of Christianity and to this also there is a very different counterpart in Buddhism. The mother of Prince Siddhartha, who was to become the Buddha, died seven days after his birth. Her name was Maya, which is the Sanskrit name for the Divine Illusion. This illusion is the whole manifested universe and at the same time the substance, ideal or energetic rather than material, out of which it is manifested. Therefore Maya can also be regarded as the Ideal Prototype or Pure Energy out of which the worlds evolve. She is eternally

virgin, existing as she does on a plane above change or becoming, and yet is the Universal Mother, being the origin of all forms and beings. It is from her that the Budhi or Logos descends upon man's heart, and in this sense she is the Mother of God. And Maya disappears from the heart of a man when Enlightenment comes to him, just as Queen Maya disappeared from the world when the Buddha-child was born into it.

Agnostic critics of Christianity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries thought they were deflating it when they proclaimed their discovery that the doctrine of a Virgin Mother was not original to Christianity but had been held in other, pre-Christian religions also. It would have shown more understanding had they examined its significance and seen that, as an eternal cosmological truth, it could be recognized in principle even without the additional aid of its physical manifestation, which came later through Christianity. Simone Weil, a pro-Christian writer of rare perspicacity, saw this. Writing of Prometheus who brought down the gift of fire to mankind (a gift equivalent to Light or Knowledge, a bringer equivalent to Christ or Buddha or Hermes) and who was crucified for their sake, she says: 'Prometheus has for mother a goddess who has, among other names, Themis, justice; another name is Gaia, Earth. This is the mother goddess whom one also meets under the name of Isis and of Demeter, she of whom Plato in the *Timaeus* speaks in mysterious terms, naming her matter, mother, nurse, door, hallmark, describing her as always intact, though all things are born of her. It is she who was adored in several places where today a black Virgin is preserved.'¹ The Greek Hermes and Roman Mercury, the Messenger from the Gods to man, has as his mother Maia, which is the same name as the mother of Buddha and almost the same as the mother of Christ. In mediaeval Christendom

¹ *Intimations of Christianity among the Ancient Greeks*, p. 69. Routledge and Kegan Paul.

the esoteric sciences of spiritual regeneration were termed 'Hermetic' and in the Great Work of inner alchemy by which the practitioner transmuted the lead of fallen man to the pure gold of man's Adamic state, Mercury was the symbol for the Christ.

In respect of the Mother also the difference between the Christian and Buddhist stories is no less significant than the similarity. A religion like Christianity, concentrating on the worship of a Personal God, requires the grace and compassion of a personal Mother; one like Buddhism, concentrating on release from the bondage of separate individual being, requires the disappearance of Maya when the divine Light has descended on earth.

Next there is a striking parallel coming shortly after birth. 'Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen my salvation' sang the aged Simeon, intuitively worshipping the infant Christ. Similarly the old hermit Kala Devala visited the infant Buddha and, checking the servant who was about to place the infant at his feet, himself bowed down. He lamented that he would die before the Great Enlightenment, which he foresaw, but, sending for his nephew Nalaka, who was then a householder, he advised him to become a hermit and await that day. Nalaka did so and later, under the Master's guidance, attained Enlightenment.

At the age of twelve Jesus revealed his wisdom, disputing with the learned doctors in the temple. At the same age Siddhartha was observed by his father sitting a whole afternoon beneath a tree, absorbed in meditation.

After this incident, nothing further is heard of Christ until he set forth on his mission at the age of thirty. Various legends have arisen about his travels in Egypt or India or other places, but the Gospels by implication refute them, making his fellow townsfolk refer to him as one who had lived in Joseph's house with his mother and brethren and practised carpentry. Indeed, it is an amazing thing that

Christ should have lived so long as an ordinary person, attracting no special attention and that his purity, power and wisdom should not have been recognized and spontaneously blazoned abroad, making him known before his time. It is a striking confirmation of the possibility of a Master concealing his true state and mixing with mankind unrecognized. More has been told about the life of Prince Siddhartha, about his education, youth and marriage, his growing discontent with the life of the world and his final renunciation, but he also remained in his father's house until he was twenty-nine, living the life to which his birth seemed to have destined him.

Siddhartha, or Gautama as he was thenceforth called, taking his family instead of his personal name, went forth in quest of Enlightenment; Jesus was already the Christ and went forth to teach. After the Enlightenment, however, parallels again appear. Buddha chose a band of disciples, as Christ did—sixty in the one case and seventy in the other—and bade them split up and carry his teachings through the land. In both cases, strangely enough, nothing further is said about this group, who must have been qualified and advanced disciples, not even their names being recorded.

Just as Christ alienated the Pharisees by bestowing his grace on Gentiles and Samaritans also, so did Buddha incense many of the Brahmins by opening the Order he established to men and women of lower castes.

Miracles play a much smaller part in Buddhism than Christianity and were indeed discouraged by Buddha, but one miracle is recorded both of him and Christ, and that is the transfiguration, when they appeared in a radiant form of light.

Just as Christ was betrayed by Judas, so was Buddha harassed by the jealous enmity of Devadatta. And in contrast to Devadatta there was the beloved disciple Ananda, just as there was John, the disciple whom Jesus loved. Neither of these, however, was chosen to preside over the organization

of the religion after the Master's death. It was St. Peter upon whom the Church was built, and it was Kassapa who summoned and presided over the first Sangam after the Buddha's death in order to clarify the discipline and unify the ritual. On the other hand, esoteric Christianity has been traditionally known as the Johanite Church and is supposed to have descended from St. John. In Buddhism it is less possible to speak of an esoterism since, as we shall show, there is properly speaking no exoterism; nevertheless, Ananda is revered as the founder of initiatic paths.

These similarities are far from implying either repetition of the same story or borrowing of one from the other; however, they do indicate a remarkable parallel. Before interpreting this we will pass from the founders to the religions and trace the parallels there also.

Hinduism is the most central and complete of Eastern religions, comprising as it does not merely religion in the stricter sense of the word but a code of social life and civil and criminal law, and having been periodically renewed in its spiritual impulse by the great Rishis. At a certain stage in its history it grew rigid and suffered a decline, at least outwardly. At this time a great Teacher arose who, without denouncing it as a whole, relaxed its social discipline, replacing the rigour of the law with Divine Compassion. By so doing he created a religion which, being independent of the Hindu social system and being centred on the person and authority of its Founder, could be adopted by the neighbouring peoples whose own religions were inadequate.

It is too obvious to need explanation that the whole of this statement applies *mutatis mutandis* to the rise of Christianity out of Judaism.

Buddhism was the first proselytizing religion. Previous to that each people had had its own religion and had considered it quite natural that other peoples should have theirs. This has been taken by some agnostic exponents of comparative religion to imply crudity and ignorance, but such

an inference is by no means necessary. Hindus and Chinese today regard a religion as a mode of approach to God or to a Divine State of Being and, while following one such, they presume that others are equally valid for those who follow them. Their religious and philosophical understanding is certainly not inferior to that of their critics, and there is no reason to presume that that of the ancients was either. The Greeks were certainly not deficient in philosophy, and since some of their philosophers had been pupils in Egypt, we must presume that the Egyptians were not either. It is true that they were polytheists, but so are the Hindus today, and, as will be shown in the next chapter, there can be far more spiritual understanding behind the outer forms of polytheism than is commonly supposed. This, however, is by the way; what concerns us here is that a proselytizing religion, although so often considered today the natural type of religion, was just as much a novelty in the East as in the West and that Buddhism supplied that novelty in the East as Christianity did in the West.

Some time after the proclamation of Buddhism there was a resurgence of spiritual power in Hinduism, bringing with it a revitalization of law and social discipline also, with the result that Buddhism was frozen out from the land of its origin and survived only in the foreign lands to which it had spread. Actually, Hinduism was bound up with its law and social structure and it may be because Buddhism, with its monasticism and social democracy, acted as a dangerous social solvent, breaking up both family and caste, that it was rejected, at least as much as for purely doctrinal reasons. Judaism also was bound up with the social and ritualistic laws of the Jews to such an extent that by becoming a Christian a man ceased to be a Jew in the full ritualistic sense of the word. Certain it is that the same fate overtook Christianity also, the same rejection at home and acceptance abroad, although much more rapidly and in a very different manner. Indeed, the difference may be symbolical of that

between Eastern and Western temperament and, what is more fundamental, of that between a metaphysical and a devotional religion. Christianity challenged and denounced Judaism and was cast out and persecuted by it, to persecute Jews in its turn when it came to power, whereas Buddhism gradually spread through India owing to the conviction carried by its mendicant teachers and was then gradually eliminated by the apostles of a revived Hinduism without the use of persecution on either side. The method was different but the result the same.

In its extension among the Gentiles no less than in its Jewish homeland, Christianity had to face persecution and (though this side of the medal is less often displayed) practised persecution when it became powerful enough to do so, in order to establish or maintain its hold. Buddhism spread through the East owing to the influence of its saints and Arahats, but they were allowed to speak and allowed others also to speak. There was no coercion on either side.

The spread of Buddhism through the East and Christianity through the West in itself constitutes a geographical parallel whose profounder implications will appear later. Even the orientation of their places of worship marks the difference, the entrance to a Christian church being from the west and that to a Buddhist temple from the east, so that they stand, as it were, back to back, facing opposite ways.

Not long after the rise of Buddhism the short-lived empire of Alexander the Great established its hold over northern India. There was a brief meeting between Eastern and Western teachers, Megasthenes and his fellow philosophers coming to India while Hindu and Buddhist teachers returned to Greece and to the new intellectual metropolis of Alexandria, named after the conqueror. Some writers have claimed to detect Buddhist influences in the later rise of Gnosticism and neo-Platonism, but it would have been natural to expect far more than a vague influence; one might

have expected the same fervour of missionary activity as won Ceylon and Burma for Buddhism or, a few centuries later, Greece and Egypt for Christianity. Similarly, when Christianity arose, it would have been natural to expect it to follow the same route as Alexander's phalanxes, through Persia to India, no less than to penetrate into the rough northern provinces of the Roman Empire and the Celtic and Teutonic fringe beyond. Certainly the path would not have been more arduous nor the listeners less intelligent; there would, in fact, have been much less likelihood of resistance and persecution. But that was not its destiny. On the one occasion on which St. Paul and a companion turned eastwards instead of westwards an angel appeared before them and turned them back.

There is, it is true, a legend that St. Thomas the Apostle carried Christianity to India and, whether through his agency or not, it certainly did arrive there very early. This, however, rather illustrates the statement that the field of Christianity was in the West than refutes it, since it shows that even when it was introduced into the East it remained a small and circumscribed body, the Syrian Church in India and the Nestorian in China. Although free from persecution, free to spread through whole countries as Buddhism did, it remained an alien creed and made little headway.

So far we have considered both the founders and the circumstances of the two religions; let us now turn to their form and structure.

There was a certain incompleteness about both of them as compared with other religions. It has been normal for a religion to involve a complete way of life with a code of civil and criminal law governing, for instance, marriage, property and inheritance, and in fact a ritualization of all the acts of life. Hinduism did, and so did Judaism. It may be argued that Taoism did not, but Taoism was rather a spiritual path to be followed by men of understanding within the framework of Chinese tradition than a new religion for an

entire people. It did not repeal the existing Chinese ritualization of life, as Buddhism did that of the Hindus and Christianity that of the Jews; in fact it accepted the new formulation of this made by Confucius. Buddha taught on the social background of Hinduism. He did not actually denounce it, but his ignoring of caste distinctions tended to dissolve the social order on which it was built, while his institution of monasticism undermined the unity and sanctity of family life. The implications of these changes were far-reaching. For instance, they threatened the system of hereditary professions and abolished the obligation to marry in order to have a son to perform one's funeral and posthumous rites. One might have thought that this laid upon Buddha the obligation of creating at least the framework of a new social order to replace that which he was dissolving, even if he left some of the details to be filled in later; but through the fifty years of his ministration he never did so. In fact, the early Buddhists continued to live among their Hindu neighbours with no great difference in their way of life, except for those who renounced the world to become monks and nuns. Even for that there was a precedent in the Hindu sadhus, the main difference being that the sadhus were solitary seekers and were not grouped or organized into monastic orders as were the Buddhist monks—also that the latter tended to be far more numerous.

There was the same outer incompleteness about Christianity, since Christ no more abrogated Judaism than Buddha did Hinduism. In doctrine the Jewish scriptures remained as the Old Testament background against which the New Christian Treatment was erected, just as Hindu religious traditions remained as the Buddhist background. The question of religious ritual and social organization was so far ignored by Christ that his foremost disciples remained in doubt about it. After his Ascension a dispute arose between St. Peter and St. Paul as to whether Gentile converts to Christianity were obliged to adopt the Jewish law

and ritual with all its technicalities or not, St. Peter holding that they were and St. Paul that they were not. The dispute, as related in the Acts of the Apostles, was referred to the Parent Church at Jerusalem, under the Presidency of St. James the brother of Jesus, and a decision was given in favour of St. Paul. The very fact that such a dispute was possible shows how socially incomplete primitive Christianity was. In fact, early Christians and Buddhists knew the spiritual path that had been laid down for them, but had no very clear idea of the social organization of their life on earth.

So far as Christianity is concerned, this deficiency has been ascribed by some critics to the alleged expectation of the forthcoming end of the world by Christ and the early Christians. This is giving too literal an interpretation to the texts. Moreover, it still would not adequately account for the lack of outer organization since, on the one hand, we find an equal lack in Buddhism which had no such expectation, while on the other hand a body of men facing a time of cataclysmic transition might be thought to stand peculiarly in need of discipline and organization.

In a proselytizing religion this deficiency is in some ways a source of strength, as can be seen by comparing these two religions with Islam, the third proselytizing religion the world has known. Islam emerged with a complete law and social system equivalent to those of Hinduism and Judaism. This meant that its adoption by any people had to be a complete cultural and social surrender. It could convert only by conquering, whether the conquest was military or cultural. Nothing could remain of the ancient Egyptian or Persian civilizations when they became Islamic, because their descendants were adopting not merely a new faith but a new civil and criminal code and a rule of life and morals governing marriage, inheritance, taxation, the position of women and relations of the sexes, ways of eating, rules of hospitality, styles of clothing, laws governing art, and in fact civilization as a whole. This, of course, meant the complete replacement

of one civilization by another. Egypt had already been Christian for several centuries and the remnants of traditional Egyptian civilization were very tenuous; they collapsed immediately before the Islamic conquest. Neither was there strong cultural opposition in North Africa, Spain or the Near East. From Persia a small cultural aristocracy fled to India to become the Parsi community, while the remainder of the population accepted Islam and the Islamic mode of life. But all this was possible only because the new mode of life was imposed by the armies of a conquering people. It was equivalent, in our own day, to the imposition of Communism on the countries of Eastern Europe by the Red Army.

This should not be taken to imply that Islam was more intolerant than Christianity; indeed, in some ways it was less so. Defenceless Christian communities existed in Islamic countries throughout the Middle Ages, the Coptic Christians in Egypt, for example, and Christian tribes in Arabia, when no such Islamic enclaves would have been tolerated in Christendom. What it means is simply that to impose a complete pattern of civilization, such as Islam, on a country normally involves prior conquest. I say normally because there may be cases, such as Malaya and Indonesia, where the indigenous cultural traditions have become so weak that a new civilization can dominate peacefully—and indeed in these lands both Hindu and Buddhist influences had preceded Islamic, so that there was no unified tradition capable of resisting.

In the Roman Empire of the first century A.D. there was certainly a spiritual vacuum, as a result of which mystery creeds such as Mithraism had already begun to seep in from the Near East; however, Graeco-Roman civilization as a whole was still vigorous and a religion which sought to impose a new social and legal structure on it would first have had to subjugate it by force. And the Roman legions were still the most powerful military force of the West. A personal

religion such as Christianity, where the emphasis was on the spiritual development of the individual and only very secondarily on the organization of society, could, however, infiltrate and build up its strength invisibly in the existing framework until it was strong enough to crack it from within. And this is what happened.

Another remarkable sign of the outer incompleteness of Buddhism and Christianity is that neither Buddha nor Christ wrote a book. There is no compilation of their teachings such as the Tao-Te-King, the Bhagavad Gita or the Quran, but only records put down after their death by their followers. Neither did they speak a language which became sacred as a liturgical vehicle in which the very word of their teaching would be stabilized. The Hebrew of Moses and the Prophets has remained a sacred language; the Arabic of the sixth century A.D. was stabilized by the Quran and has remained the sacred and classical language of the Islamic world down to this day, understood at least by the learned and in many places by the masses also wherever the Quran is read; Sanskrit is still the sacred and classical language of India, as it was when the Bhagavad Gita was composed; classical Chinese was stabilized by Lao Tsu and Confucius; but the dialect which Buddha spoke has been forgotten together with the Aramaic of Christ. Buddhist texts were preserved in Pali by the Hinayana sect and in Sanskrit by the Mahayana; the New Testament was written in Greek and translated into Latin, Greek remaining the liturgical language for the Greek Orthodox Church and Latin for the Roman Catholic Church. There are no accidents in spiritual history; this apparent deficiency must be read as a sign of the destined independence of Buddhism and Christianity from the background out of which they arose.

Instead of saying that Buddhism and Christianity are deficient in the social application of their doctrine, it might be better to put it in a different way, a way that sounds less critical, by saying that every religion must adopt one or the

other of two attitudes towards the world: either it must renounce the world or it must sanctify it. Christianity and Buddhism renounce the world. Christians are told that Christ's kingdom is not of this world. The young man who declares that he has kept the law from his youth up and lived righteously is told to give away all his property and follow Christ as a mendicant. When Rahula, Buddha's son, asks his father for his inheritance he is given a begging bowl. Both the Buddhist and the Christian are taught to regard this world as an enemy, as an evil state from which they must escape. In Christianity it is even expressly formulated that man's enemies are the world, the flesh and the devil. Confucianism, Judaism and Islam, on the other hand, seek to sanctify the world. (Hinduism does too, but in Hinduism both possibilities are developed.) This means not withdrawing from family or business life but ritualizing and spiritualizing it, bringing out its symbolism and connecting it functionally with a man's inner development. From this point of view a man would not be called upon to give away his property but to use it rightly, which is why Islam, for instance, has such detailed injunctions about paying the poor rate, caring for orphans, freeing slaves and so forth. A religion which aims at sanctifying the world requires detailed injunctions covering every aspect of life, so that every activity can be used as a means of self-development and a man can fulfil himself in his work and his family, not, as in Buddhism and Christianity, by renouncing them.

A peculiar commentary on the other-worldly nature of Buddhism and Christianity is the choice that was offered both to Buddha and Christ between royal power and spiritual authority. Not only was this foretold, as already mentioned, at the birth of Buddha, but again, after his renunciation of family and property, he was tempted to make himself a great king and establish order in the world through his royal power, just as Christ was tempted in the wilderness to accept worldly power in lieu of his spiritual mission. In

the world-sanctifying type of religion no such conflict could arise. Moses was the ruler of his people as well as their prophet; so was Mohammad. Confucius served as Minister of Justice in his State. Rama was a king, although for many years he renounced his kingdom on a point of honour. Only in the founder of the world-renouncing type of religion is such duplication of rôles impossible.

Nothing that has been said above must be taken to imply that the author considers one of these two approaches inherently superior to the other. To set oneself up as a judge between religions would be arrogant in the extreme. Those who do so blind themselves to the status of the men whom their attitude forces them to belittle. Smug is the kindest word that can be used of such an attitude. In its essence every religion is divine; in form it is a human institution, and every institution carries in itself the seeds of its own decay. A world-sanctifying religion is in danger of petrifying into barren ritual and routine, as Judaism was doing at the time of Christ, when he found it necessary to remind the priests that the sabbath was made for man and not man for the sabbath. On the other hand, a world-renouncing religion is in danger of shrivelling into mere private opinion or beliefs with little influence on life, as is the case by and large in Christian countries today.

This other-worldly nature of Christianity explains its successful wedding with Imperial Rome. Rome had an excellent legal system but lacked spirituality; Christianity had a spiritual path but lacked a social and legal code. During the lifetime of Christ it was taken for granted that in affairs of this world (which Christians were in any case to shun) Jewish law still applied except insofar as specifically abrogated by Christ. As remarked above, St. Peter even held at first that this law should be imposed on Gentiles also. If he had won his point, Christianity would have been restricted to the rôle of a Jewish sect with a few foreign converts, for Rome would certainly never have submitted to it.

Instead it was uprooted from Judaism and took root in the Graeco-Roman world, accepting Roman law as its worldly basis.

It could not create a social and legal code of its own because Christ had specifically said that his kingdom was not of this world, and his actions and injunctions had provided no pattern for a social order or legal code. In case of theft, his injunction was to give the thief more than he took, in case of assault to invite further assault. Oriental teachers also have given such instructions to a sadhu, a world renouncer, but a code of law for a whole community cannot be built upon such an attitude. The clearest illustration of this was the case of the woman taken in adultery, when Christ forbade any to execute sentence on her unless he himself was without sin. This was raising the conception of crime to that of sin. A world-renouncing religion is concerned only with sin, and obviously a man who is himself burdened with sin becomes a hypocrite if he takes it on himself to punish the sins of others. But a state needs a conception of crime also and has to punish crimes regardless of whether they are sins or not. For instance, drinking alcohol in a country which has prohibition is a crime but it is not a sin; but in Islam and Judaism the law is contained in the scripture, and therefore eating pork or (in Islam) drinking alcohol is a crime in that it is a breach of the law and at the same time a sin in that it is a defiance of scripture. Similarly, adultery is both a sin and a crime. As a sin, forgiveness can be prayed for, but as a crime punishment is demanded; and those who punish the crime are not guilty of judging the sins of others but are merely fulfilling their duty as citizens. Christ's decision with regard to the woman taken in adultery must have seemed to the Pharisees an act of anarchy, abrogating the law in a particular case without replacing it by any other.

At first the Christians were a scattered minority among the Jews, then among the Greeks and Romans: men and

women who were vowed to God, dedicating their lives to the spiritual quest and content to obey the law outwardly so long as it did not contravene their religion. But as soon as whole peoples became Christian and Christian states arose, a law and social code had to be sponsored. On the whole, that of Rome was accepted and the canon law of the Church was built on it.

The law of marriage is a good example of this. In Jewish law polygamy was allowed. Among the early Christians marriage in general was discouraged, as it normally is among world-renouncers. St. Paul allowed it as a concession to human frailty. But there was no more law against polygamy than against monogamy. St. Paul wrote to one group of converts that a bishop (by which one must understand a Christian in a position of some authority, as there was no regular Church organization or hierarchy as yet) should have only one wife; but this might just as well be taken to imply that a layman might have more than one, or why the distinction? As late as the fifth century, St. Augustine could still give it as his opinion that in provinces such as North Africa, where polygamy was previously established, it could be allowed to continue. But the Roman system was monogamous and therefore monogamy prevailed. However, on the few matters on which Christ had given a ruling, this of course overrode Roman law. For instance, Christ had forbidden divorce and therefore, although it had been allowed in pagan Rome, it was forbidden in Christian Rome.

As a result of its fusion with Rome, Christianity ceased to be Semitic. Something of its Semitic background no doubt remained, but by its absorption of Roman law, Greek philosophy, Teutonic chivalry and Celtic mythology it became both an epitome and a sublimation of Western civilization. Its philosophical writings were more reminiscent of Greece than Judea; its canon law was mainly Roman; its art developed the Western iconographic traditions that were anathema to the Jews.

China was the great Empire of the East, as Rome was of the West, and played a similar rôle in the development of Buddhism, although with important differences. There was a spiritual vacuum in China, as there was in Rome, though in this case it was not due to a lack of spiritual understanding, as it was in the case of Rome, but only to a lack of adaptability, Confucianism being too cold and scholarly for the masses of the people and Taoism too austere and remote. The emperors and their advisers must have appreciated this lack for they themselves introduced Buddhism into the Empire although personally remaining Taoists or Confucianists. Buddhism did not have to infiltrate in defiance of the Empire, as Christianity did in Rome; neither did it capture the Empire as Christianity did Rome. China retained its indigenous spiritual paths but accepted Buddhism as a third religion. Through its long sojourn, Buddhism became as deeply tinged with Chinese philosophy as Christianity did with Greek. An interesting sign of this is that a recent collection of Buddhist texts, edited under the title *A Buddhist Bible*, by Dwight Goddard, contains the Tao-Te-King, the Gospel of Taoism, on the plea that its influence on Buddhism has been so enormous that it can be regarded as a Buddhist source-book. Indeed, the Buddhism that spread from China to the neighbouring lands, such as Korea and Japan, was as much Chinese as Indian in background, just as the Christianity that spread to Gaul and Britain was as much Graeco-Roman as Semitic. In both cases the absorption of alien influences was a price paid for the infiltration of alien territory. In both cases, moreover, there was a branch of the religion which did not submit to the influence but equipped itself through other heterogeneous influences to face the problems of adaptation to the world: an Eastern Christianity and a Southern Buddhism.

A characteristic of the world-renouncing type of religion is the cult of celibacy and monasticism. To people brought up in Christian or Buddhist traditions this may seem a

natural expression of spiritual aspirations, but it should be remembered that they are the only two monastic religions. In Judaism, Confucianism and Islam there is no monasticism. Marriage is not only normal but an obligation. Moses, Lao Tsu, Confucius and Mohammad were themselves married. In this connection also it is to be noted that Hinduism contains both possibilities.

During the lifetime of the Buddha, his followers were already grouped together as monks and nuns and monasteries were built for them. In fact the way of declaring oneself a whole-hearted disciple was to renounce the world and enter a monastery; though it is to be remarked in parenthesis that Buddhist monks are not completely immured from the world as Christian monks usually are, since they normally spend only the wet season in a monastery and wander as mendicants in the dry season. A full and detailed code was drawn up, governing their life and discipline although, as already remarked, no social code for the laity was established. Laymen could continue to conform to the existing law, not having emancipated themselves from it by renunciation.

No monastic code was drawn up either by Christ or his apostles, although Christ went so far as to say that nobody who did not renounce the world and become a mendicant could be his disciple.¹ So long as Christians were a scattered minority in a non-Christian community, the very fact of being a Christian was a sort of withdrawal from the life of the world. Once whole peoples began to call themselves Christian it was inevitable that the urge to withdraw should take monastic form.

Monasticism creates the problem of those who do not renounce. Both in Christianity and Buddhism they became indirect or second grade followers of the religion. In fact a world-renouncing religion is not really a religion for a whole people so much as a path for the elect. Buddha recognized the existence of lay followers and Christ visited

¹ St. Luke xiv. 33.

householders and participated at a wedding celebration, but both made it clear that renunciation was the better course. Those, therefore, who did not renounce were not whole-hearted followers of the Master. As we have already seen, their social organization was left to the secular power—'Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's'. In Christianity the problem of their religious guidance was solved by the development of a secular priesthood distinct from the monks. The lay Christian approached God not directly but through the mediation of the priest and was considered a passive rather than an active Christian. This was symbolized by his reception of the bread only at communion, representing the body or substance of Christendom, whereas the priest received both bread and wine, representing the infusion of the Spirit.

In parenthesis it may be remarked that the anti-sacerdotal writing which has been so prominent in Europe since the nineteenth century tends to overlook the fact that priesthood as known in the West is a purely Christian institution. Protestant and agnostic prejudice against it has led writers to ascribe its real or supposed vices to other civilizations also without sufficient discrimination. The priests in ancient civilizations, like those of the Jews and the Hindus, were temple functionaries and had charge of temple ritual and education, but they were not parish priests and had not the control over the laity which confession, communion and the theory of meditation gave to the mediaeval Christian priesthood. In Islam there is no priesthood at all. Every Muslim is a priest for his own family. A mosque may employ a professional Imam to lead in congregational prayers, but in case of need any other adult male Muslim can step forward and do so in his place. It is the ideal of renunciation which degrades those who do not renounce to a lower rank, thereby inviting a system of priestly mediation.

Despite this, Buddhism has not developed a secular clergy. Spiritual influence radiates out from the temples and

monasteries, but there is no organized system of diffusion. To some extent the monks care for the spiritual welfare of the laity. In some Buddhist countries their influence is widespread owing to the tradition that every man should enter a monastery for a certain period on attaining maturity (for monastic vows are not permanent and irrevocable as in Christianity). With all this, however, the spiritual interests of the laity are not so systematically cared for as in Christendom.

While the whole trend of Christ's teaching emphasizes renunciation, a specific decision in favour of the contemplative rather than the active mode of life was given in the case of Mary and Martha. When he visited their house, Martha bustled about doing the housework in honour of their wonderful guest, while Mary left everything and sat at his feet to absorb his teaching. Martha complained that she was not doing her fair share of the work but Christ rejected her complaint, declaring that Mary had chosen the better way. This has always been understood as a general sentence, grading the contemplative above the active mode of life. 'Friend, let us take all these words and these gestures that were disclosed between our Lord and these two sisters and make of them an example for all active and all contemplative persons who have been since then in the Holy Church, or who shall be until the day of judgement. By Mary is understood all contemplatives; and they should make their lives conform to hers. And by Martha the active person is signified, in the same manner and for the same reason.'¹

Since the Renaissance there has been a tendency in the West to reverse this decision. Mysticism, renunciation and monasticism are apt to be denounced as unsocial, while social service is proclaimed the truest religion. In thousands of books, both fiction and theory, the staunch social worker is held up for admiration, while the man who strives in solitude to overcome his ego is either deprecated or at best

¹ *The Cloud of Unknowing* (trans. by Ira Proloff), xvii, 4. Rider & Company, 1959.

ignored. Actually, this tendency was already developing before the Renaissance-Reformation revolt against a spiritual organization of life and may be held to have been one of the causes of it as well as one of its effects. The same fourteenth-century mystic whom we have just quoted goes on to say: 'Just as Martha complained then about Mary her sister, so do active persons complain about contemplative persons unto this very day.'¹

In terms of the Gospel story, this attitude of mind means that Martha chose the better way. Everyone is entitled to his own opinion, but is one who rejects the decision of Christ in favour of his own opinion entitled to call himself a Christian? Whatever the modern tendency to replace spiritual striving by social service may be, it is not Christian, and that should be recognized. It is a natural tendency in a materialistic age which reposes faith in man's powers to mould his environment and ignores the potency of spiritual influences. It would be a spiritual degeneracy in any religion, but in a religion of world-sanctification it would at least be a natural degeneracy, whereas in a world-renouncing religion such as Christianity it is little short of apostacy.

The remarkable thing is that the founders of the Reformed Churches were all convinced that they were returning from the tradition of Rome to the teaching of Christ. If there was one slogan which would have united Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, and all the Protestant Fathers it would have been 'Back to Christ!' And yet they were overlooking what, for Christ, was the essential: the spiritual path for the individual aspirant who renounced his property and became a mendicant, making no plans for the morrow, striving simply to be born again of the Spirit. What they did was to take the remnant of Christ's teaching apart from this and, by fusing it with a certain amount of Old Testament teaching, as regards, for instance, the observance of the sabbath, swing Christianity right over to a world-sanctifying religion.

¹ *ibid.*, 18.

In parenthesis, it is an interesting reflection that this brought about an outwardly similar development to what would have occurred if the Christians had accepted Islam, as Muslims hold that they ought to have done. The Muslim contention is that when Christ told his disciples at the end of his mission that he had still many things to declare to them and that after he had left them the Comforter would come who would not speak of himself but only what was revealed to him, he was prophesying the coming of Mohammad and the revelation to him of the Quran. If Christians had accepted this viewpoint Christianity would have been converted into a world-sanctifying religion in the seventh century A.D. instead of the seventeenth. However, there would have been a vital difference, for Islam, while creating a social organization, still retained paths for the full spiritual development of the individual, which seem to be lacking in the modern world. In any case a might-have-been is an illusion, for events take their prescribed course and do not happen by accident. Christ himself said no less when he declared that 'evil must needs come'. The course which history has been taking in the last five centuries or so has been towards a diminution and final rejection of spirituality, and although it arose in the West and spread out from there it has become world-wide.

It is no policy of this book to take sides between sects, and it should be added that the founders of Protestantism had certainly no idea that in cancelling Christ's appeal for renunciation they were laying the axe to the tree of religion. Indeed, no one would have been more surprised or indignant if they had been told that the individual interpretation of the Bible for which they were fighting would lead to eighteenth-century rationalism, nineteenth-century agnosticism and twentieth-century secularism, leaving no place for religion except as private opinion; and yet this course of development was inevitable, for once the spiritual essence of religion has been lost the remainder begins to wither. Nor has the

spiritual decline been restricted to the Protestant sects, although they may have unwittingly opened the door to it, for Catholicism also, in its present state, seems more inclined to deny than to expound the esoteric meanings of the scriptures and the paths a man can follow to sanctity. And since mention has been made of Islam, it should be added that the same trend is to be seen there also, for the Wahhabi sect, which now holds Arabia and the holy cities, also claims to go back to the Prophet but also omits the essential in doing so, the esoteric interpretation which gave rise in the past to the Sufi saints and poets.

A doorway was opened to the same spiritual degeneracy in Buddhism through the Mahayana doctrine of compassion. Once more I hasten to say that it is not the purpose of this book to take sides between sects, and indeed I know of no more living source of Buddhist spirituality today than Tibetan Buddhism and Zen Buddhism, both of which are Mahayana; but the doorway was opened and the abuse has come in. The Buddha exhorted his followers to renounce the world and strive inwardly, being a light to themselves and a refuge to themselves, so as to attain Enlightenment. Those who thus attained were known as Arahats. Some centuries later, however, Mahayana Buddhism was developed with the ideal of the Bodhisattva, the person who has qualified himself for Enlightenment and can at any moment become an Arahat, entering Nirvana and abandoning the world as an unreal appearance, but who refrains from taking this final step out of compassion for suffering mankind, choosing rather to live among them and even to be born again and again in order to help them before securing his own release. This, of course, is a noble ideal and the full meaning of it will become clearer in a later chapter where a passage will be quoted from the Diamond Sutra showing that it does not really imply any diminution of spiritual perception if rightly understood. Unfortunately, however, it may be superficially understood and serve to place action

above contemplation, the very mistake which is characterized in Christianity as setting Martha above Mary. For instance, a modern Western Buddhist can say in a summary of Buddhist doctrine: "The term *pratyekabuddha*, as used by both schools, means a disciple or an arhat who is selfishly desiring Nirvana for his own satisfaction."¹ Since the quest for Enlightenment in Buddhism or any other religion means the attempt to uproot selfishness and utterly destroy it, to call it selfish is a contradiction in terms and therefore a logical absurdity. What makes it the more inexcusable in the present case is that the book from which it is taken actually contains the Diamond Sutra to which reference is made above and which, as will be shown, specifically guards against any such error.

Another complementary form of spiritual degeneracy which has overtaken the modern world is the establishment of the secular state. By subtracting education, law, government, and, in fact, the whole organization of life, from the control of religion, it reduces it to little more than personal faith and private opinion. This attitude towards religion also came into vogue with the Renaissance-Reformation revolt against a spiritual organization of life and society. It was definitely formulated at the Treaty of Augsburg after the wars of religion with the international acceptance of the principle of *cuius regio eius religio*, giving the ruler of any state the right to dictate its religion. It has by now won general acceptance both in theory and fact. It is often represented with pride as one of the great achievements of modern civilization, the triumph of material civilization over obscurantism, preparing the way for tolerance. Actually it is the proclamation of a new sense of values, placing the things of this world above the things of the next. Even the tolerance which began to grow up a century or so later was rather indifference than true tolerance. Modern men are no more

¹ *A Buddhist Bible*, edited by Dwight Goddard, p. 655. Harrap and Co. Ltd.

tolerant than their forbears about anything that interests them, as can be seen from their attitude to Communism or Fascism, whether for or against. True tolerance was to be seen in traditional India and China where the way of life and the education and upbringing of the young was governed by religion but minorities following a different religion—Buddhism, Christianity or Islam—were allowed to follow their way of life.

This is a type of degeneracy of which a world-renouncing religion stands particularly in danger. In fact, it might at first sight appear to be sanctioned by Christ himself, since he put up with a non-Christian state, as Buddha did with a non-Buddhist. His injunction to render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's might be taken to sanctify the division between the spiritual and social order of things, between things of this world and things of the next; and indeed it has been so taken and was used at one time to justify the absolute power of kings. But this overlooks one important consideration: that is that early Christians were to renounce this world. A secular state could be recognized so long as it was regarded as an alien, unspiritual world to be renounced, but in modern times it is not; it is regarded as Christian simply because the Christian religion is generally professed, although the government does not accept Christian guidance. This is neither one thing nor the other. The alternative would be a state indirectly Christianized, as in Mediaeval Christendom, through the control of the Church, through the adoption of a code of law and ethics and a system of education sponsored by the Church, a state in which secular interests were subordinated to spiritual. There is no such state today. In fact the state has become almost as secular as the government of Pilate. Why then should Christians accept it or call it Christian?

One of Christ's repeated announcements is that neutrality is impossible: a man cannot serve God and Mammon; if he is not for Christ he is against him; he can only save his life

by giving it. The Christian, therefore, has only two alternatives in his attitude to the secular state: either to accept it as something alien to which he owes no attachment, and only so long as it does not encroach on his religion, as the early Christians accepted Caesar, or to strive to subordinate it to the Christian cultural, social and ethical code, as the mediaeval Church did. The Muslim has no alternative at all. His religion lays down an organization for the life of this world also, and therefore for him to accept a secular state which organizes life contrary to the rules dictated by his religion is just as much apostasy as it is for a Christian to accept social service as a substitute for spiritual endeavour.

This is an ideal statement, because in fact the conditions of the modern world are such that it is almost impossible for a man to conform outwardly to the demands of his religion. Where there is the will to do so inwardly there can be no blame on him. In fact it is specifically stated in the Hindu scriptures that the path will be made easy as never before in this *kali-yuga*, this spiritually dark age. But although there is good will in some there is also much smugness and self-satisfaction and this needs to be exposed by calling things by their true names. I have discussed the conditions and signs of the times in another book, *The Rhythm of History*;¹ it is enough here to indicate, so far as the theme of the book calls for it, the courses which some of the religions have followed and the decline into which they have fallen.

In this chapter I have dealt with the more superficial correspondences between Buddhism and Christianity. Although it may seem like a digression, an exposition of Hinduism will greatly facilitate a comparison of their deeper spiritual content and their doctrinal forms, and therefore the next chapter will be devoted to that.

¹ Orient Longmans, Calcutta.

Hindu Viewpoints

IT IS not because Buddhism sprang from Hindu soil that Hinduism has been taken as a scale for comparison but because both Buddhist and Christian viewpoints are to be found in it, existing harmoniously, side by side. Admittedly, the common background and terminology that it shares with Buddhism makes the comparison easier, but it is not essential. Essentially it would be just as suitable for the purpose if it were some newly discovered religion of the Amazon valley with an Aztec terminology. This point is important because it means that the historicity of Hinduism as now understood does not have to be considered. Hindus themselves are convinced that the same doctrine is taught in the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita and that it is the *Sanatana Dharma*, the Eternal Doctrine, which was followed long before the time of Buddha and is followed unchanged in essentials today. Some foreign scholars have questioned this, representing Vedism, Brahmanism and Hinduism as three religions or three stages in the development of a religion. However, we are not concerned here with questions of history but only with the doctrines and paths of Hinduism as understood by Hindus. Therefore, in illustrating these, quotations will be drawn from any sources, ancient or modern, which are recognized as authoritative by Hindus today.

I refer to the 'doctrines and paths' of Hinduism because a doctrine is normally the theoretical basis of a path by

which to strive for spiritual illumination, just as the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism serve as the introduction to the Noble Eightfold Way. Christ also told his followers that he was the Way, and the word Tao means Way. To regard a doctrine as a belief or philosophy without practical implications is a spiritual emasculation.

Hinduism contains a number of *darshans* or doctrinal viewpoints. These are not rival sects, as in Christianity or Buddhism, but viewpoints all of which are recognized as legitimate, each providing the theoretical groundwork for a different type of path. According to a man's understanding and temperament he may be drawn to a more or less direct path, and each path has its own theoretical basis. A Guru usually expounds one such viewpoint and guides his disciples along the path that is based on it and he may even, for their sake, proclaim it the best or the only perfect path, but if questioned he will admit the legitimacy of others also. For instance, Sri Ramana Maharshi in modern times taught the doctrine of Advaita and the path of Self-enquiry based on it, but if some devotee found this too arduous and preferred a less direct path he would confirm that that also was good.

The ultimate and most direct viewpoint, the very quintessence of Hinduism, is the doctrine of Advaita or non-duality. This is, roughly speaking, the doctrine that Being is One. I say 'roughly speaking' because even this is too limiting a definition from a strictly philosophical point of view. The word 'Being' is objected to as too definite, suggesting a comparison with or exclusion of non-being, while the word 'non-dual' is preferred to 'one', since the conception of 'One' may suggest limitation by the existence of some 'other' outside the 'One'. 'It is the beginningless, supreme Brahman which is said to be neither Being nor Non-being.'¹ That-which-is is infinite; and there can be nothing outside Infinity or it would not be infinite, being limited by the exclusion of what was outside it. To put it mathematically:

¹ *Bhagavad Gita*, xiii, 12.

infinity minus ∞ is a contradiction in terms, since the exclusion of ∞ makes the first term finite. Similarly, to speak of an Infinite God and of other beings outside God is a contradiction in terms, a mathematical absurdity. God is either finite or the Non-duality.

How then, it may be asked, according to this doctrine, can one account for the universe and all its beings? They are simply manifestations of the Being, having no separate individual reality, subtracting nothing from its Infinity when coming into being and adding nothing to it when re-absorbed, mere reflections of one aspect or possibility of the Being that is their Essence, like one man reflected in many mirrors. 'That Being which is the subtle Essence is the Self of the whole world. That is the True. That is Atma. That art thou.'¹

The truth of this is to be felt in the heart; however this whole world is a book of symbols (which is the meaning of the Hermetic saying 'as above, so below' and of the Judaic saying that God created man in His likeness), and therefore there are physical illustrations which aid in understanding. One of these has just been referred to—the reflection of a man in many mirrors from different angles; another is a man's dream. The people, places and events in a man's dream have no reality outside his mind and no separate being apart from him; they detract nothing from him when they come into existence and add nothing to him when they cease to exist. So it is with God's creatures in the universe.

However, no symbol is perfect, because the finite cannot perfectly reflect the Infinite. To explain manifestation, the symbol of the dream would have to be supplemented by that of the tree whose vast possibilities of trunk and branches, leaves, flowers and fruit, grow into actuality from a small seed: 'I am also the seed of all beings, Oh Arjuna,'² and by that of the day and night of God, the alternate phases

¹ *Chandogya Upanishad*, 6-8-7.

² *Bhagavad Gita*, x. 39.

of manifestation and dissolution, light and dark, the breathing out and in of Brahma, the rushing out from Unity to wider and wider dispersion in multiplicity and then the drawing back. 'From the Unmanifest are all things manifested at the dawn of day and into this same Unmanifest are they absorbed at the coming on of night.'¹

Some critics have misrepresented this doctrine as pantheism. It is, of course, nothing of the sort. It does not assert that the sum of all the things in the universe makes up God, any more than the sum of persons and things in a man's dream makes up the man, or that the universe is God, any more than a man's dream is the man. A man contains his dream within his mind, but his own existence continues as though there had been no dream. Similarly, the universe does not make up God but is a mere manifestation of God, while the Unmanifested Godhead remains as It was. If this can be easily understood of a man and his dream, why should it be so hard to understand of God and the universe?

Some have found this doctrine hard to understand because they are told that the whole universe is an illusion; and yet they have an illustration of that also in a dream. It seems real enough to them while the dream lasts, but as soon as they wake up they find that it was an illusion. Moreover, their own physical science, of which they are so proud, teaches them that the solid objects they see about them are not solid at all but are masses of whirling atoms and that these atoms consist rather of energy than matter, in other words that they are an illusion of matter. What is said by the advaitic teacher is not that the world is absolutely unreal or illusory but that it is real as a manifestation of Being but unreal as a self-subsistent entity, just as a modern physicist might say that it is real as an atomic formation but unreal as solid matter, just as a dream is real as a dream but unreal as actual existence. The old friend

¹ *ibid.*, viii, 18.

whom you see in a dream after losing track of him for ten years is real as a dream but unreal as a human visitor. The traditional illustration of this is a man who sees a piece of rope lying on the floor in the twilight and mistakes it for a snake, as a result of which he is struck with fear. When the sun rises he sees that it was only a piece of rope all along and that his fear was groundless; it was unreal as a snake but real as a piece of rope.

It is necessary, however, to safeguard against one misconception which makes a monstrous error out of the whole doctrine, a misconception to which man is drawn not by its logic, for it has none, but by the tenacity of the ego: that is the conception that I am real, my ego is real, but all other egos are an illusion. Western philosophy has indeed toyed with this view and discarded it. To come back to the same illustration of the dream, it would be as though a man's dream-self in his dream were stated to be real and to be dreaming all the other persons in the dream. That, of course, is absurd. All are equally dream-stuff. It is only the man who can conceive of himself, his own ego, as well as all else, being a manifestation of the One Self, devoid of separate individual selfhood, who can comprehend the doctrine of Advaita in its purity. It is not a question of mental acuity, for many of the keenest minds are bound down by egoism; rather it is the ability for conscious ego-effacement that is required. This points the deeper meaning of Christ's insistence on humility and his saying that the truth was hidden from the wise and learned and revealed to the childlike.

Does this mean, then, that a man has to accept his own non-existence? Yes and no; as Christ said, he has to surrender his life in order to find it. For there is one point in which the symbol of a dream is incomplete, and that is the most essential, the point which gives life to the whole doctrine, which makes it not merely a mental toy for philosophers to play with but a life-line to Beatitude. This is that, whereas

the figures in a man's dream have no consciousness and cannot realize that their true self is the mind of the dreamer, man can do this in the Cosmic Dream; and it is this that is the goal aspired to. It is at this point that the doctrine becomes a path, showing the way from darkness to Light, from frustration to Bliss, from destiny to boundless Freedom, from limitation to the Infinite Expanse of Being. Realizing his separate, limited individuality to be an illusion, a man simultaneously realizes the Absolute to be the true Self of him. Self is the best translation of Atma. As Paramatma or simply Atma, it means the Divine Self, the Spirit, the Absolute; as jivatma it means the individual self, the soul or ego. Traditionally the ego is compared to a doll made of salt. When it plunges into the Ocean it loses its form, which was also its limitation, ceasing to exist as a doll but existing henceforth in and as the Ocean.

'It is only because of ignorance that the Self appears to be finite. When ignorance is destroyed, the Self, which does not admit of any multiplicity whatsoever, truly reveals Itself by Itself, like the sun when a cloud is removed.'¹

It might seem that one who has awakened to this realization of Truth has nothing more to do with human life, and indeed this is true insofar as death would no longer be any deprivation to him, since he no longer identifies himself with the limited being that was born and has to die. Nevertheless, it is possible for him to live out his human days, fulfilling his destiny with all the appearance of human limitation, apparently like others while really Liberated and immersed in the measureless Bliss of Being, as did Christ and Buddha and the Hindu Rishis and later Sages. To take another traditional illustration: it is like a man who acts a part in a play, knowing all the while that it is not himself and therefore acting it with as good a grace and as little perturbation whether it is a fortunate or a tragic part, whether he is Brutus who stabs or Caesar who is stabbed.

¹ *Atmabodha*, v. 4, by Shankaracharya.

He has recovered from the amnesia under which he identified himself with the rôle he was playing and has become consciously the self he always really was, but that is no reason for not acting the play out to the end.

'He whose actions are free from desire and premeditation, whose actions have been burnt in the fire of Knowledge, him the wise call a Sage. Renouncing attachment to action and the fruit of action, always contented and dependent on none, he does nothing even though he is engaged in activity.'¹

He does nothing in the sense that the actor who plays the part of Brutus does not really plot against the ruler of the state or help to murder him and is not guilty of murder or treason. He performs the actions that are laid down for him, knowing that it is not he who does these things. This is he to whom the much abused Biblical phrase applies that 'he is a law unto himself'. Having no ego or self-will, he has no sin or responsibility. It is a state very rarely attained.

One who has no conception of the 'Peace that passeth understanding' might consider this a drab, uninteresting state to be in, but that is because he sees only the individual interest that is expelled and not the Divine Peace that takes its place. 'He who is at harmony gives up the fruit of his actions and thereby attains abiding Peace, whereas he who is not at harmony is attached to the fruit of his actions by desire and is in a state of bondage.'²

Nor is the peace a mere negative peace, a freedom from the shocks and troubles of life; it is a state of intense bliss. 'He whose mind is unattached to the objects of the senses attains to the Bliss of the Self. With his being absorbed in Brahman, he enjoys imperishable Bliss.'³

This state is termed Moksha or Nirvana. Its quest and

¹ *Bhagavad Gita*, iv, 19-20.

² *ibid.*, v. 12.

³ *ibid.*, v. 21.

attainment is the very essence of Advaita. Just as in physical science the theory exists for the sake of the application, so it is this application which justifies the doctrine. The Tamil poet Thayumanavar says of it: 'It means survival after the extinction of the ego. Then arises Bliss which is the true Self. There is nothing else. Only those who have attained this state have won freedom from rebirth.'

It is not merely Peace and Bliss but is man's true Self, his real nature, if he would but realize it. 'Thou art Eternal Bliss pervading everywhere, within and without. Why dost thou then wander from place to place like a ghost?'¹

Advaita is, therefore, at the same time an assertion that there is nothing real apart from the supreme Reality of the Self and an exhortation to the listener to apply this to himself and realize his identity with the Self. It is both doctrine and path. It is not an exhortation to achieve something or become something but to realize what is now and eternally whether realized by you or not. 'There is neither you nor me nor the world; there is only Atma.'² Realization is merely removal of obstructions to the identity which always existed. 'When a pot is broken the space that was enclosed in it merges with universal space. Similarly, when the mind becomes pure only the immaculate Atma remains.'³ Therefore Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi, the great advaitic Sage of modern times, used to say that it was only a question of disrealizing unreality and Reality would shine forth of itself.

It is the doctrine of Advaita which, being represented (or more often misrepresented) as the Hindu viewpoint, has been attacked by many Western critics who dismiss it as vague, mystical or pantheistic or condemn it for its lack of a Personal God. The above exposition, brief though it is, should be sufficient to show how groundless are such

¹ *Avadhuta Gita*, i. 14.

² *ibid.*, i. 15.

³ *ibid.*, i. 30.

attacks, but in any case there are two considerations which invalidate them.

The first is that, as already indicated, Advaita is a spiritual science and, as in physical science, the theory serves only as a basis for the practice. If the experiments work and the expected result is achieved, as declared in the works of the great poet-saints such as those quoted above, it is no use quarrelling with the theory. And on the other hand, to declare in the face of such evidence that the experiments do not work without having tried them is a proof merely of the arrogance of the critic. This, unfortunately, is what happens.

The other objection is equally fundamental in a different way. It is that, although Advaita is the quintessence of Hinduism, it is by no means the only Hindu viewpoint or even the most widely followed. Side by side with it there is the devotional worship of a Personal God, as in the West. Neither is it a question of rival creeds, for, as explained at the beginning of this chapter, both attitudes are recognized as fully orthodox. To condemn Hinduism for one viewpoint without mentioning the other betokens either inadequate study or lack of sincerity.

The Bhagavad Gita, from which I have quoted verses expounding the path of Knowledge or Advaita, expounds also the path of devotion or duality, thereby giving guidance to people who follow this way also. To them it says: 'Fix your mind on Me, be devoted to Me, worship Me and bow down to Me; then you shall come to Me. Truly do I promise you, for you are My beloved' (xviii. 65). Even Shankaracharya, the great exponent of Advaita, wrote poems of a devotional strain also:

Save me from pride, O Vishnu! Curb my restless mind.
Still my thirst for the waters of this world's mirage.
Be gracious, Lord! to this Thy humble creature
And rescue him from the ocean of this world.¹

¹ *Six Stanzas to Vishnu*, v. 6.

Ramana Maharshi, the great advaitic Sage of modern times, wrote an ecstatic devotional hymn for his devotees to sing:

Entering my home and luring me forth, why didst Thou
imprison me in Thy heart's cavern, Oh Arunachala?
Was it for Thy pleasure or for my sake Thou didst win
me? If now Thou turn me away the world will blame
Thee, Oh Arunachala
Avoid this blame! Why didst Thou recall Thyself to
me? How can I leave Thee now, Oh Arunachala?¹

Swami Ramdas, whose world tour in 1955 made him known to many in the West, writes in one of his little booklets: 'Be conscious always that the God you worship is within you and everywhere about you. His protection and grace are there ever for you. Be always aware that He is guiding you from within.'² This could be paraphrased from the Quran, the most monotheistic of books, where it says: 'Whichever way you turn, there is the Face of God' (ii. 115), and 'He is nearer to you than your jugular vein' (1. 16).

Not only is the worship of the Personal God a widely developed form of Hinduism, but the worship of God Incarnate in human form. God in His aspect of Preserver is called Vishnu and His Incarnation is termed an Avatar. This term is sometimes more loosely used in modern times, and indeed is often misused both in India and the West, but in its precise, technical meaning it is a Divine Descent or Incarnation, of which ten are recognized in this whole cycle of human history from the primordial state known to the West as the Earthly Paradise to the consummation anticipated as the Heavenly Jerusalem. More will be said about this in the next chapter, but it is pertinent here to note that there is

¹ *Marital Garland of Letters to Sri Arunachala*, vv. 3-5. *Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*. Rider and Company.

² *Glimpses of Divine Vision*, p. 19.

a very wide cult of the Seventh and Eighth Avatars, Rama and Krishna. The story of Rama as the Perfect Man is told in the epic poem, the Ramayana, and closely connected with this is the Yoga Vashista, a purely advaitic scripture that was taught to Sri Rama in his youth. Devotees of Rama strive mainly through intense devotion to him, by striving to model their lives on his and through invocation of his name. The great Hindi poet Tulsidas wrote:

Let any one accept and follow whatever path he pleases,
But for me Thy Name is the granter of all boons.

The paths described in the Vedas for Liberation, the
paths of action, worship and Knowledge, are all
good,

But I seek one only, and that is Thy Name; I seek
nothing besides.

Alas! I wasted all these years on other things, like a dog
rushing from place to place,

But now, having tasted the sweet bliss of Thy Name,
I cast not my glances elsewhere.

It is the fulfiller of my wishes here and in the world to
come.

The Gospel of Sri Krishna is the Bhagavad Gita, perhaps the most beloved and widely read of all Hindu scriptures. Worship of him is one of the paths ordained in it. 'I provide for and maintain the welfare of all those who worship Me with undivided mind' (ix. 22). 'I am the Source of all; everything is produced out of Me. Knowing this, the wise worship Me with devotion' (x. 8). 'To those who are ever devoted to Me and worship Me with love I give the Yoga of wisdom by which they come to Me' (x. 10).

There are also symbolical legends of the love between Krishna and the cowherd girls, who represent the devotees and of his union with Radha, who is the human soul. In the Bhagavata, the record of this love-play, when Krishna has abandoned the Gopis and they are searching despondently

for him, he says: 'How can I, the embodiment of Mercy, be cruel, and to My own devotees? No, never! My disappearance is only a veil that I draw in order to increase their yearning and love for Me in the fire of separation. Just as a poor man who stumbles by chance on a treasure and then loses it again broods constantly on it, so I wish My devotees never for a moment to forget Me.'

One does not need to be a Hindu to understand this. Any mystic in any religion who has been blessed with a glimpse of the Divine Grace and then striven to recover it during the 'dark night of the soul' will recognize it.

Worship of Krishna has remained through the ages one of the great rivers of Hindu devotion and one of the main inspirations of art, poetry and dancing. Typical of it is the devotion of the sixteenth-century woman saint, Mira Bai.

Come to me, Thou Lord of my heart!
I am consumed in separation from Thee; come, slake
my thirst for Thee!
I pass the night treading the courtyard over and over
again;
Desire for food and sleep has left me. Why does not my
life-breath leave me too?
Give life to me in my weakness, Oh Lord, by a vision
of Thee!

She was married to a younger brother of the ruler of Chittor. He and his family, resenting her life of devotion and her association with wandering sadhus, persecuted her and forbade her to spend her days in worship or to mix with sadhus. Infuriated by her persistence, they gave her poison and she drank it but remained unharmed. Then they sent an armed force to demolish the temple of Krishna where she worshipped, but this also proved of no avail. In one of her songs she says:

Having the blessed shelter of the Lord over my head,
I have no fear and care nothing for your threats, Oh
Rana!

You say that I must give up the company of sadhus
because my court ladies shrink from them,

But I answer that they are like my parents, Oh Rana! so
why should the ladies shrink?

In his anger the Rana sent me a cup of poison; I drank it
off gladly and it was changed to nectar.

He then raised an army to attack me.

What a strange battle was that! The forces of the Rana
on one side and Mira alone on the other!

Yet, protected by love of the Lord and by patience and
armed with non-violence and devotion,

Mira easily prevailed over the forces of tyranny.

Miracles occurred around her, as happens so often in the
ambiance of a saint, although he himself may not consciously
or deliberately perform any miracle. Her songs became so
famous that the Moghul Emperor Akbar went in disguise
with the court musician Tansen to visit her in the city of his
Rajput enemies. And in the end she abandoned everything
and went to live as a homeless mendicant at Brindavan, the
holy place where Lord Krishna had lived when he was on
earth. Arrived there, she sought audience with the famous
sadhu Jiva Goswami but he sent reply that he could not see
any woman. The word 'Purusha' is used to mean both
'male' and 'the Spirit', and Mira sent back the message: 'It
is the first time I have heard that there is more than one
Purusha at Brindavan. What presumption is this?' Recogn-
izing the truth of her perception, the sadhu himself came
and bowed down before her.

Many such are the stories of poets and devotees, but one
never hears of a devotee of Krishna denouncing a devotee of
Rama or trying to convert him. Why, then, should either
quarrel with a devotee of Christ? They understand and
recognize his path and have only goodwill towards him. It

seems too obvious to them to need proof that if God can appear on earth in the form of Rama He can appear also in the form of Krishna and of Christ. 'God is the Master-Actor Who plays different rôles in different guises on the stage of the universe. He hides Himself in finite creatures in His inscrutable art. Those who lack devotion can never by mere cleverness unravel the play of the Creator in His manifestation in innumerable names and forms, just as one lacking appreciation cannot discern the underlying mood in the speech and performance of a drama.'¹

Sri Ramakrishna, the great nineteenth-century saint, followed mainly a devotional and ecstatic path but he allowed no narrowness, no ignorant denunciation or exclusion of other paths. He said: 'The eternal religion, the religion of the Rishis, has existed from time out of mind and will exist eternally. This *sanatana dharma* contains all forms of worship—worship of God with form and worship of the Impersonal as well. It contains all paths, the path of Knowledge, the path of devotion and so on.' He also said: 'I ask a Vaishnava [worshipper of Vishnu] to hold to his cult and a Sakta [worshipper of the Sakti or Divine Mother] to his. But this also I say to them: Never feel that your path alone is right and that the paths of others are wrong and full of errors. Hindus, Muslims and Christians are going to the same goal by different paths.'

It is clear, then, that criticism of Hinduism for worshipping the Impersonal Absolute instead of a Personal God falls to the ground for the simple reason that it is not true, that worship of a Personal God is an equally orthodox form of Hinduism no less widely followed. What is needed, since it cannot be denied that Hindus harmonize the two viewpoints, is to rise above the level of acrimony to that of humility and try to understand how they do so.

The philosophical explanation might run as follows. In the beginning there is God alone, the Atma or Absolute.

¹ *Bhagavata*, 1. 3, 36-7.

The first stage of manifestation or devolution (without, however, affecting the changeless integrity of the Absolute) is Its condensation into the Supreme Being or Personal God, for Whom, in this sense, the name Ishvara is used. (And it must be understood that 'first' does not mean here first in time, since time is only a condition governing this physical universe; rather it means first in principle.) The next step is the polarization of Being into Purusha and Prakriti: on the one hand Spirit and on the other Universal Primordial Substance as it is prior to the emergence of forms and beings. This is not 'matter' as understood in the West (or perhaps one should say as it used to be understood in the West) but rather the all-embracing potentiality which I referred to in the first chapter as being revered in various religions as the All-Mother and at the same time (being prior to any kind of change) as the Virgin Mother. Each creature is as much the child of Prakriti as is the entire universe, and in the heart of each is the seed of Purusha, the Spirit. And, since the Spirit is changeless and indivisible, the Purusha in the heart of a man can be none other than the Divine Purusha Who is Atma, the Self or Absolute. Substance is divisible; Spirit is not. Atma, Ishwara, Purusha and Prakriti are not to be thought of as separate beings. Atma is the Self of all. The same Atma that is recognized as the Self by the Advaitin is the Personal God Whom the devotee worships.

Speaking as Prakriti, Sri Krishna says: 'I am the Source of all; everything is produced out of Me.'¹ Speaking as Purusha, he says: 'I am also the germ of all beings.'²

However, the Purusha in a man does not know itself for Atma, for, from its union with the body, there arises a false or illusory being known as the *jivatma* or ego. Forgetting its divine universality, the ego imagines itself to be a separate, limited, self-existent being. Nevertheless, it retains a dim intuition of its true state and, when this is activated by the

¹ *Bhagavad Gita*, x. 8.

² *ibid.*, x. 39.

necessary spiritual impulse, it may set out, like the prince brought up in exile in a poor cottage in any of the symbolical legends of ancient times, on the quest to establish its true identity and thereby recover its birthright. That is to say that the doctrine of Advaita leads naturally to the path of Self-enquiry, the question 'Who am I?' There is no answer to the question, for the answer 'I am Atma' or 'I am Purusha' would set up the appearance of an equation, of complementarism: ego = Atma; whereas there is no equation, no duality; there is Atma alone. The result of the quest successfully pursued is simply the dissolution of the ego in pure Consciousness, so that Atma alone remains. The question ceases to be asked because there is no one left to ask it. The Self simply is itself in full awareness. Nothing new has been achieved; only the veil of ignorance has fallen away.

But that is not the only possibility. It is also possible that the ego, feeling its inadequacy and weakness, seeing itself bound by destiny and foredoomed to death, retains an intuition of its Divine descent and worships the Purusha as its Father and Creator ('I am the Father of this world,' Bhagavad Gita, ix. 17). Drawn back to God by the power of love, it will also (for in spiritual things different symbolisms are not mutually exclusive) worship Him as the Divine Lover, just as the Church or the human soul is the bride of Christ and the Gopis are the brides of Krishna. The person who takes this attitude is the devotee, worshipping and seeking Divine Union.

God is the Father or the Divine Lover so long as a man believes in the reality of his own ego and seeks to purify it by love and worship; but after attainment of the Mystic Union the two become One, or rather it is realized that there never were two but that the Lover was the Self. However, the worshipper need not worry about this. It will remain a mere theory for him and it will not help him either to assert it or deny it. What is necessary for him is to carry on wholeheartedly with his worship, not to speculate what lies beyond

it. So long as a man believes in the reality of his own ego, so long is the world a reality outside him and the Purusha the Reality above him, the Reality of God Who created him and to Whom he returns. The important thing is not to argue whether the ego is real or not or whether God is real but to strive either to dissolve the illusory reality of the ego and realize one's identity with the Purusha or to return by devotion to the God Who created one. This is explained by Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi in his *Forty Verses on Reality*.

'All religions postulate the three fundamentals: the world, the soul and God, but it is only the One Reality that manifests as the three. It is only as long as the ego endures that one says "the three are really three". Therefore the perfect state is inherence in one's own Being, where the ego is dead.

'What does it help to argue: "The world is real"; "No, it is an illusion"; "the world is consciousness"; "No, it is Bliss"; "No, it is not"? That state is truly blissful in which one has given up the objective outlook and lost all conception of unity or duality, of oneself and ego, in Knowledge of the Self.

'If one has form, the world and God will appear accordingly; if one is formless, who is to see their form, and how? Without the eye can anything be seen? In truth one is oneself the eye, the Infinite Eye (vv. 2-4).'

It may well be that such an explanation will prove unsatisfactory to the theorist, in fact that he will consider it question begging and ask for a straight-forward answer: 'Is there a Personal God or isn't there?' For him most certainly there is. If he himself does not conceive of the unreality of his own ego neither can he conceive of Oneness with the Self. His mistake in asking for a definite answer is in deifying the reason and crediting it with the power to grasp spiritual truths. This is impossible. The reason is a faculty of the ego and if the ego as a whole is to disappear into nothingness before the Self or to submit wholly to the Love of God,

how is the reason to hold aloof and check up on it? Rationally, the mind contains and absorbs what it knows; spiritually it is contained in and absorbed by the Truth. The method of knowing is totally different. This is expressed by Sri Ramana Maharshi in the line: 'I sought to devour Thee but Thou hast devoured me.'¹

This means that the rationalist cannot be given an answer. Whatever answer he puts forward will be wrong because it will be claiming the power of the reason to adjudicate. This is a danger that always besets the theologian or philosopher. It need not always overwhelm him, for it is possible for him to apprehend the truth integrally and intuitively and simply essay to help others by expounding it rationally; it is only when he aspires to discover and formulate the truth rationally that he is foredoomed to failure; which is why philosophers on the whole give up all claim to certainty and simply proffer opinions. Humility is an essential equipment for the quest, and this does not mean only humility towards others; primarily it means humbling the ego before Divine Truth however and through whatever channel it may appear.

Not only is mental speculation impotent to reveal spiritual truth, but by arrogating to the mind the power to control the spirit, it may impede a man's progress. At best it is worthless. It is as though the Hebrews in the wilderness had sat down to dispute the contours of the Promised Land or importuned one who had been there to tell them tales about it, when what was needed was to get up and strive to get there. Buddha refused to answer questions about man's posthumous state, about the eternity of the world, and so forth. Many writers have commented on this and some have not failed to attribute it to ignorance or agnosticism. The surprising thing is that they overlook the fact that this attitude is not peculiar to Buddha but is normal among

¹ *Marital Garland of Letters to Sri Arunachala*, v. 28. *Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*. Rider and Company.

Spiritual Masters. The Tao-Te-King says nothing about the posthumous states of man. Neither do the Hebrew scriptures. Christ let fall a few hints that later theologians could pounce upon but was far from providing a guide-book to theorists. It is after the Masters have departed, when the clear flame has sunk to an ember, that theorists arise and map out the path instead of trying to follow it.

There is a story from the life of the Buddha that vividly illustrates the uselessness of such theory. A disciple once asked him for a full explanation of cosmology and the posthumous states of man, determining to leave him if he could not give it. The Buddha first asked him: 'Did I ask you to follow me in your spiritual quest or undertake to answer such questions if you did? Or did you make any such agreement with me before joining the Order?'

And he had to admit that he had not.

The Buddha then continued: 'Know, then, Malunkyputra, that one who seeks elucidation of such futile questions which do not in any way conduce to real spiritual progress and edification is like one who has been pierced by an arrow and refuses to let the doctor pull it out or dress the wound until he knows who it is that shot him, whether he is a Brahmin by caste or a Kshatriya or Vaishya or Shudra, and what family he comes from and whether he is tall, medium or short, and whether fair, black, yellow or brown in complexion, and what kind of bow and arrow he used, and so on. Such a man, Malunkyaputra, would die before he learnt all these details.'

In modern times also the great Masters have discouraged speculation and urged their followers to get down to the practical work of religion, that is inner development. Sri Ramakrishna, explained in the homely imagery that came natural to him: 'Suppose you go into a garden to eat mangoes. Is it necessary for you first to count the number of trees in the garden, which may be many thousands, then the number of branches, which may be hundreds of thousands?

Certainly not; you should at once, on the contrary, proceed to eat. In the same way, it is useless to enter into all sorts of discussions and controversies regarding God, which would only cause a waste of time and energy. One's present and important duty is to love God, to cultivate Bhakti or devotion.¹

Sri Ramana Maharshi was equally reluctant to expound theory and often refused to do so. If asked about life after death he might reply: 'Why do you want to know what you will be when you die before you know what you are now? First find out what you are now.' And this was no psychological investigation but something far deeper, for what you are now, if truly realized, is the birthless, deathless Atma beyond which there is nothing to know, either past or future. Similarly, if asked about God he might say: 'Why do you want to know about God before you know yourself? First find out what you are.'

Furthermore, he asserted quite definitely that the path of Knowledge, which is Advaita, and the path of devotion, which is duality, lead to the same Goal. Considering, then, that both types of path exist in Hinduism, each with its doctrinal basis, and that the Scriptures and the Sages consider them compatible, the question might arise on what basis one is to choose. Supposing a young Hindu or a Westerner were to decide to follow a Hindu path, how would he decide which one? It is mainly a matter of temperament and aptitude, since all are valid. It may be a matter of destiny also, on which path he can find guidance, for the events of a man's life do not happen by accident but are the medium of his development. Truth is simple, the Self is simple, but the ego is complex; and the further a man is removed from spiritual understanding the harder he finds simplicity. Most Hindus, even though they recognize the truth of Advaita in theory, find it too steep a path to follow in practice, and choose instead a more devotional path with more of worship

¹ *Memoirs of Ramakrishna*, p. 256. Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, Calcutta.

in it, a path of *dvaita* or duality. Typical of this was the great Marathi poet Tukaram, who recognized the Advaitic path but did not feel drawn to it. 'I do not seek Divine Knowledge. I shall ever desire dual consciousness. Thou shalt ever remain my Lord and I Thy worshipper.'

There are other aspects of Hinduism also, such as the yogic and tantric paths, but they do not directly concern us here, since the purpose of this chapter is not to give a complete account of Hinduism but only to depict those aspects of it that bear on the theme of this book, that is the comparison of Buddhism and Christianity.

Nevertheless, something should be said about Hindu polytheism, or it may appear that a rare philosophical aspect of Hinduism is being presented, a sort of export variety, while its popular, everyday side is concealed. Indeed, there have been writers who have represented Vedantic spirituality and popular Hinduism as two different religions. This is utterly untrue. There are, of course, great differences of understanding between man and man, as in all religions, but the religion itself is the same. What distinguishes it from more uniform religions is merely its enormous scope, offering diverse levels of understanding and modes of approach.

There are three different types of religion: non-theism, monotheism and polytheism, and all three exist in Hinduism. It was customary among Western writers of an earlier generation, when progress was considered a master key to fit all locks, to speak of monotheism as an advance or progress from polytheism, and this attitude is still popularly held, even though scholars are abandoning it. One frequently, for instance, comes across the statement that the Jews are to be honoured as the first people who rose to the conception of pure monotheism. Leaving the basic question of progress as applied to religion to be considered in the next chapter, it is nevertheless pertinent to ask here whether religion is to be regarded as an expression of immutable, transcendental

truth or as a set of human theories and superstitions. If the former, it is obviously not capable of progress; if the latter, is it worth bothering about? If Truth stands solid, like a mountain, it may wear a different face as seen from every side and different paths may lead up to it, running at short range in different directions; but if there is no Absolute Truth, or if it is unknowable, how does it help one to accept one set of speculations rather than another?

The facile attitude which speaks of monotheism as progress forgets about non-theism altogether, but that also has to be accounted for. Of the great religions of today, Judaism, Christianity and Islam are monotheistic, Hinduism is polytheistic, and Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism are non-theistic, so that such an attitude would automatically classify the three Semitic religions as more 'advanced' than Hinduism and would have no clue at all as to the three non-theistic religions. It would be still more confused by the fact that Hinduism, as shown above, also contains both monotheistic and non-theistic possibilities, while Buddhism and Taoism both contain polytheistic elements. Obviously, the intelligent student is not going to be satisfied with such an over-simplification.

This is an argument based rather on understanding than research; nevertheless, research also is coming to the same conclusion. In a recent study of prehistoric religion, E. O. James writes that: 'Under the influence of the evolutionary thought that predominated at the end of the last century, a unilineal development of religion was postulated proceeding in an orderly sequence from animism through polytheism to monotheism.' This theory he discards, quoting evidence that (as Livingstone had long ago noted in all the Negro tribes he contacted) there is everywhere a belief in a Supreme Spirit behind the gods and spirits even among the peoples considered most primitive. 'Such a conception of Deity, which is almost indistinguishable from that which obtains in the higher monotheisms like Christianity, Islam

or Judaism, is a religious response to the notion of a divine Providence more fundamental than any gradual development from plurality to unity.' He continues very significantly: 'so far from animism and polytheism passing into monotheism as a result of abstraction and generalization, simplification and unification, speculation about nature and its processes and man and his constitution appears to have led to the peopling of natural phenomena with a multiplicity of spirits, tutelary divinities, departmental gods and culture heroes in such profusion that the remote High God often has retired into the background.'¹ It will be seen that this indicates a process rather of degeneracy than progress in spiritual life.

However, polytheism is not necessarily a form of degeneracy. If it were it would mean that Hinduism is and always has been degenerate. That profoundly intelligent and spiritual Hindus can be polytheists does not admit of dispute, since they are. The only question is how they can so be. The answer is that the polytheist does not really worship many gods but simply envisages God in many forms. 'Under whatever name and form one may worship the Absolute Reality, it is only a means for realizing that Perfect Being without name and form.'² Form is ascribed to God only as a concession to the weakness of the worshipper who cannot conceive of the Formless Absolute. Can those who criticize idolatry? If a man cannot conceive of himself without form, that is without ego and without body, how can he conceive of God without form? And if one form, why not more? The Godhead can be conceived from many aspects like a mountain seen from many sides. The French Indologist Louis Renou remarks rather petulantly in one of his books that it is difficult to catalogue the Vedic gods because whichever one is being revered at the moment is given the attributes of the others and regarded as the Supreme

¹ *Prehistoric Religion*, pp. 204-8, by Professor E. O. James. Thames and Hudson, Ltd.

² *Forty Verses on Reality*, v. 8. *Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*. Rider and Company.

God. Precisely. He had unwittingly stumbled on the answer to the problem. Each one is the Supreme God. In fact, it is said in the Veda: 'There is One but they call Him by many names.'¹ The great nineteenth-century orientalist Max Mueller perceived this and invented the term 'kathenotheism' or more briefly 'henotheism' for worship of One God in many forms, of which only One is worshipped at a time. Only recently has the general trend of scholarship been to accept such a definition.

Forms help to lead the limited human mind towards the Formless, and any particular God is simply God particularized. There is a description in the Bhagavad Gita of how Krishna revealed himself to Arjuna in his Divine Form. It was a form according with Hindu mythology, and Arjuna was overwhelmed by the majesty and splendour of it; nevertheless, he knew Krishna to be Formless Being manifested here on earth in human form. A similar revelation has been recorded of Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi, who was One with the Self, and is instructive because he himself gave the explanation. A devotee by name Raghavachariar tells the story.

'After half an hour I opened my mouth and said, "Just as Arjuna wished to see the form of Sri Krishna and asked for *darshan* [vision of him] I wish also to have a *darshan* of your real form if I am eligible." He was then seated on the *pial* [dais] with a picture of Dakshinamurthi² painted on the wall next to him. He silently gazed on, as usual, and I gazed into his eyes. Then his body and also the picture of Dakshinamurthi disappeared from my view. There was only empty space without even a wall before my eyes. Then a whitish cloud in the outline of the Maharshi and of Dakshinamurthi formed before my eyes. Gradually the outline (with silvery lines) of these figures appeared. Then eyes,

¹ *Rig Veda*, i, 164, 46.

² Siva manifested as a youth who teaches through the transmission of silent influence. The Maharshi was sometimes identified with Dakshinamurthi.

nose, etc., other details were outlined in lightning-like lines. These gradually broadened till the whole figure of the Sage and Dakshinamurthi became ablaze with very strong and unendurable light. I closed my eyes in consequence. I waited for a few minutes and then saw him and Dakshinamurthi in the usual form. I prostrated and came away. For a month thereafter I did not dare to go near him, so great was the impression that the above experience made on me. After a month I went up and saw him standing in front of Skandashram. I told him: "I put a question to you a month back and I had this experience," narrating the above experience to him. I requested him to explain it. Then, after a pause, he said: "You wanted to see my form, you saw my disappearance; I am formless. So that experience might be the real truth. The further visions may be according to your own conceptions derived from the study of the Bhagavad Gita." ¹

There are numerous gods and idols in India, but the two aspects under which God is most often worshipped are Siva and Vishnu, for Siva is God to the Advaitin and Vishnu to the devotee who admits duality. Indeed, the terms 'Saivite' and 'Vaishnavite' have acquired practically the same meaning as 'Advaitin' and 'dualist'. It is commonly held by Indologists that Siva is a god of the Indus Valley Civilization adopted later by the Aryans, since the name is not found in the Vedic hymns. It will be apparent from what has gone above that the question is almost meaningless. There are other names of Siva—Rudra, Natarajan, Mahadev—it is simply one way of conceiving of God, the Nameless and Eternal. Sri Ramakrishna explained the One Identity under the names as follows: "The same Being whom the followers of non-dualistic (Advaita) Vedanta call Brahman, the Absolute, is called Atman (Self) by the Yogis and Bhagavan, or the Personal God with divine attributes by the devotees

¹ *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge*, pp. 107-8, by A. Osborne. Rider & Company.

or Bhaktas (lovers of God). When a Brahmin worships the Lord he is called a priest and when the same Brahmin is employed in the kitchen he is called a cook.¹

According to Hindu mythology, the Absolute, Brahman, first manifests as Ishwara, the Supreme Being, the Personal God with Attributes. Ishwara then (it must be understood that 'then' does not imply temporal but ideal succession, as this refers to the realm of timeless reality) manifests in the three forms of Brahma the Creator (the masculine form of the neuter Brahman), Vishnu the Preserver and Siva the Destroyer. The Advaitic view, as already explained, is that nothing new has to be discovered or created in the quest of Realization, only the veil of ignorance due to egoism has to be destroyed so that the Identity which eternally is may be revealed in all its splendour. Therefore the Advaitin worships Siva, the Destroyer of Illusion. But for him this has very little to do with mythology, for the Siva he worships is Mahadev, the Great God, Atma, the Self, containing Ishwara, containing all mythology, containing heaven and earth, containing the worshipper himself. This may seem kaleidoscopic and confusing, even more so when it is remembered that there is also the division of Ishwara into Purusha and Prakriti, Spirit and Substance referred to earlier. Its justification is in its purpose, which is not to provide a philosophical system but to supply an aid to the worshipper. The Advaitin worships Siva the Destroyer of Illusion, and in doing so he realizes that Siva is God, the Spirit, the Self, containing all the universe and all the forms and names of God. It might be asked why the Advaitin should require the concept of God at all, and in theory the question is apt; indeed, it will be seen in dealing with Buddhist doctrine that the Buddhist normally does not; however, this twofold approach is often found useful, combining love and worship with knowledge.

The dualists, those who conceive of the worshipper as

¹ *Memoirs of Ramakrishna*, p. 119. Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, Calcutta.

a real individual being separate from the God he worships, worship God rather as Vishnu, the Preserver. He who maintains the universe in being and, out of love, guides all creatures on their destiny to their final return to Him. One form that His guidance takes is incarnation, and therefore the worshippers of Rama or Krishna or (the Hindus would say) of Christ are worshipping God as Vishnu, the Father and Preserver, Incarnate in human form.

In common speech, the Hindu uses the word 'Swami' (Lord) or 'Bhagavan' in speaking of God, not the name of any particular God. In worship he uses the symbolism of one or another aspect of God.

The mythology includes goddesses as well as gods. If a god is a Divine Aspect or Principle, its Shakti, that is its energy or activity, is represented as the goddess. For instance Vishnu in mythology is God as the Preserver, and therefore his wife, Lakshmi is the goddess of wealth and prosperity, the means of preservation. The wife of Siva has various names and appears in various forms. One of them is Kali, the Goddess of Destruction, who is represented garlanded with human skulls. It is she who has so horrified Western sightseers and has been used with such effect as anti-Hindu propaganda; and yet the symbolism of destruction ought to be understood by a people who in their own religion practise the symbol of eating the flesh of their God and drinking his blood. One of her most impassioned worshippers was Sri Ramakrishna, whose ecstatic purity the whole world has recognized. Let us therefore see how he explains the doctrine of the Shakti.

'The followers of Advaita Vedanta maintain that creation, preservation and dissolution, the individual ego, the external world, all these are the manifestations of the eternal Energy (Shakti). They also say that when these are properly analysed they appear as dreams, that the absolute Brahman alone is the Reality and all else is unreal. Even eternal Energy (Shakti) is like a dream, unreal; but you may analyse

and discriminate thousands of times, you cannot transcend the realm of divine Energy (Shakti) unless you have reached the highest state of *samadhi*, super-consciousness. The very thoughts like "I am meditating", "I am thinking on the Absolute", are within the realm of Shakti. They are the manifested powers of that eternal Energy. Therefore the absolute Brahman and the eternal Energy are inseparable and one. The existence of one implies that of the other, as fire and its burning power. If you admit the existence of fire how can you deny its burning power? Again, the power of burning cannot be conceived as separate from fire. In the same manner, we cannot think of the rays of the sun without thinking of the sun himself. Again we cannot think of the sun without thinking of his rays. Therefore no one can think of Brahman as apart from Shakti or Shakti as separate from Brahman. Likewise no one can conceive of the phenomenal as independent of the Absolute, or of the Absolute as apart from the phenomenal. The same eternal energy, the Mother of all phenomena, is creating, preserving and destroying everything. She is called Kali, the divine Mother. Kali is Brahman, Brahman is Kali, one and the same Being. I call Him Brahman when He is absolutely inactive; that is when He neither creates nor preserves nor destroys phenomena; but when He performs all such actions, I call Him Kali, the eternal Energy, the divine Mother. They are one and the same Being, the difference is in name and form, just as the same substance is called by different names in different languages, such as *jal*, *pani*, *aqua*, water, etc. Yes, the Being is the same, only the names are different under different aspects—like the same substance expressed in different languages, such as *jal*, water, *aqua* and *pani*, etc. A tank may have four *ghats* (landing places with steps). The Hindus drink the water from one *ghat* and call it *jal*; the Mohammadans drink from another and call it *pani*; while the English from the third and call it water. Similarly, God is one, only His names are different. Some call Him by the name of Allah, some God,

some Brahman, others "Kali, others again Rama, Hari, Jesus, Buddha."¹

Mythologically Kali is the wife of Siva, and yet it will be observed that in the above explanation Sri Ramakrishna does not use the name Siva but Brahman, the Absolute, and does not even find it necessary to comment on the change of names. This is significant because it illustrates how a Hindu naturally and as a matter of course uses whatever name of God seems appropriate. The foreign scholar, having learnt that Kali is the Shakti of Siva, might feel himself bound to adhere to the forms of mythology, but Sri Ramakrishna cares only that he is speaking of God and of Divine Energy personified and therefore quite naturally uses the term Brahman.

It may be asked why such mythology and symbolism should be necessary at all. Obviously it is not necessary or it would be used in all religions, but it is a picturesque vehicle for spiritual philosophy and cosmology, expressing it in a form that people will gladly listen to and easily remember, so that when they come to ponder over it or meet a teacher who can expound it the meaning will be recognized. In any case, it is, together with non-theism and monotheism, one of the means that have been used for the declaration of the Divine Mysteries. That is all that we have to establish. No man is called upon to say why.

It will be illustrative to take a sample story from Hindu mythology. It is said that the *devas* and *asuras*, that is the gods and devils or good and evil spirits, wished to acquire *amrita*, the nectar of immortality or elixir of life which was sunk in the ocean of milk. The only way to do so was to churn the ocean. They did this by rotating in it Mount Meru, the holy and central mountain, one party pulling it one way and one the other. The first result was to bring up poison so terrible that the whole world might have perished of it, had not Siva swallowed it. It penetrated only as far as his throat,

¹ *Memoirs of Ramakrishna*, pp. 122-3. Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, Calcutta.

which turned blue from it, whence he is represented in iconography as blue-throated. After that the *amrita* was obtained. The *devas* wanted it all for themselves but the *asuras* naturally refused. Thereupon Vishnu assumed the form of a beautiful woman and the *asuras* were so infatuated that they forgot all about the *amrita*. There are more details and the story continues further, but this is enough for analysis. It has both a macrocosmic and a microcosmic symbolism. The following elucidation would be accepted by the pandits, and it seems probable that at least some schools of Western psychologists also would recognize it. From the point of view of the spiritual quest it is obvious.

When a man undertakes the quest, his higher and lower tendencies, *devas* and *asuras*, tug either way at his ego, rotating it back and forth and churning up his subconscious. The first result is to bring to the surface his lower possibilities, of which perhaps his conscious mind had hitherto been unaware. These threaten to destroy him but the Guru takes them on himself. Individually this depicts the sustaining power of the Guru; cosmically it is the doctrine of atonement: 'He that taketh upon himself the sins of the world.' When finally the *amrita* is obtained it has to immortalize only the good, not the evil tendencies. This is the attainment of a beatific state by the individual aspirant; cosmically it can refer to the perpetuation of the achievements of this cycle of human development (to which fuller reference will be made in the next chapter) in the Heavenly Jerusalem, which inaugurates the next, while the lower tendencies and those who manifest them are swept away. It is the same as Christ's parable of the division into the sheep and goats. But in order to be destroyed they must first be deluded; they must not want the *amrita*. Therefore Vishnu, the God of Preservation, God who holds the universe afloat despite its persistent downward tug to materialism, who bears the aspirant through all the dangers and hardships of the quest, takes a form of illusion, the illusion of worldly values, and they

are so infatuated by this that they forget about spiritual life, leaving it to the *devas*.

Such stories are as widely known in India as fairy-tales in Europe, but most people attach little importance to them. Those with understanding can expound them, but they do not form a very vital part of Hindu religion. They loom much larger to the scholar than the devotee, which is a pity, as the scholar, especially the foreign scholar, often lacks the traditional key to them.

Other polytheistic religions, such as the Graeco-Roman and Germanic, have been of the same type. The references to Pythagoreanism scattered through ancient literature leave no doubt that there was a tradition involving initiation and spiritual training, some parts of which involved silence and seclusion and which seems to have been not dissimilar to that which has recently been discovered to have existed among the Essenes in Palestine; also that this had been strongly influenced by Egyptian teachings. It is also clear that Socrates, Plato and the neo-Platonists were, at the least, serious seekers with considerable theoretical understanding, even if there was not spiritual Enlightenment. Moreover, the myths themselves show signs of having incorporated a wisdom which must once have been articulate, as that of the Hindus still is today. One example will be enough to illustrate this. The legend of the marriage of Psyche and Eros is a transparent symbol of the spiritual quest. Psyche is the human soul. She is espoused by the God of Love, but in darkness, her spouse visiting her only by night and forbidding her to see his face. Her jealous elder sisters (the human faculties which have developed earlier than spiritual intuition) tempt her to disobey and light a lamp in order to see him. She does so and is astounded by his radiant beauty but, as the outcome of her action, he has to leave her and a long and arduous quest follows, full of hardships and trials, before she is raised to heaven and openly reunited with him. It is the same experience as that symbolized by the story

of Krishna and the Gopis referred to earlier, when he says: 'My disappearance is only a veil that I draw in order to increase their yearning and love for me by the fire of separation.' It is the experience of the spiritual traveller in every religion: the secret bestowal of grace, the attempt of the mind to grasp it, followed by its apparent withdrawal and the long quest in the 'dark night of the soul'.

Simone Weil saw and elucidated some of the implications of Greek mythology. 'Notice that if one couples the perfectly just being, who is a man and whom the anguish of the crucifixion puts to death, and Prometheus, who is an immortal god and whom a tradition recalled by Hesiod regarded as perpetually crucified, one reaches the analogy of the double conception of the sacrifice of Christ, sacrifice which has once been consummated, but which, by the Mass, renews itself perpetually to the end of the world.

'The kinship between the perfectly righteous one, Prometheus, and Dionysus, the Soul of the World, on the one side, and, on the other, Love, makes apparent beneath all these names a single and same Personage, who is the only Son of God. One could add Apollo, Artemis, celestial Aphrodite and many others.

'All these concordances, short of denying the historical character of the Gospels, which it would seem difficult to do sincerely, carry no threat to the faith, but are on the contrary an overwhelming confirmation of it.'¹

Here again we have what Max Mueller called 'henotheism'; 'He is One but they call him by many names.'

Having spoken thus far of polytheism, something should be said of animism also. This, as remarked above, is now regarded rather as a degeneracy of polytheism than an earlier stage of it. As a matter of fact, it is a degeneracy that may overtake any religion, non-theism, monotheism or polytheism; and in fact the degeneracy of Buddhism has been

¹ *Intimations of Christianity among the Ancient Greeks*, p. 11. Routledge and Kegan Paul.

largely in the direction of animism, as that of Christianity has in materialism.

However, to say that animism is a form of degeneracy does not mean that all its beliefs are necessarily groundless or all its rites inefficacious. Most peoples have believed that there is a large and varied population of incorporeal beings, just as there is of physical fauna. There are the nymphs and satyrs of ancient Greece, the djinn and afrits of Islam, the Irish leprechauns and Norwegian trolls, the sylphs and salamanders of the mediaeval sorcerer. Such creatures are held to vary as much as the playful domestic kitten and the panther lurking to spring upon some unwary traveller, some are friendly and gentle, some playful and indifferent, some potent and menacing. Christians and Buddhists presumably believe in some at least of them, since Christ is said to have cast out devils from the possessed, while Buddha is said to have taught the Way to the disembodied spirits as well as to humans (as also, incidentally, is Mohammed). The modern materialist, believing only in what he can see and touch, will perhaps feel more affinity for the Advaitin, who brushes aside all such things; but it is only an apparent affinity. The Advaitin denies the reality of the spirit worlds only from the ultimate standpoint from which he denies the reality of this physical world also. They are as real as this world is. To dismiss them as unreal while accepting this physical world as real is the part only of the materialist.

Believing in such incorporeal beings, it is inevitable that men should try to influence them in order to obtain their desires and to avert evil. This may take an innocent form such as leaving out a saucer of milk for the little folk at night, but it may take far more dangerous forms and develop techniques as precise as those of physical science, for harnessing spirit forces which can bring benefits to their master and injure his enemies, but which can also destroy him if they get out of control. Or it may lead men to invoke temporary possession by a spirit which will give

powers of clairvoyance as with the shaman or the African witch-doctor.

The fundamental demand of every religion is that one should renounce worldly values in pursuit of spiritual; therefore animism and sorcery are opposed to the very spirit of religion, seeking as they do to placate or control spirit forces in order to attain worldly values. This is no less true if the purpose is to obtain clairvoyance of psychic powers, since there is nothing spiritual in all this. Animism may be rampant in some Buddhist countries, but it is certainly not Buddhism, any more than materialism is Christianity.

3

The Thesis

IN THE light of what has been said about Hinduism, it is now possible to propound the main thesis of this book. That is that Buddhism and Christianity are the two complementary aspects of a single process: the provision of a proselytising religion based on a Divine Founder in two forms, advaitic or metaphysical for the East and dualistic or devotional for the West, for the benefit of peoples whose own religions had lost their spiritual potency. The lapse of five centuries between the enunciation of the two religions is negligible in the whole course of the cycle of human development; moreover it is appropriate that the metaphysical aspect of the revelation should have come first in time, being first also in principle.

It is also no accident that the metaphysical revelation should have occurred in the East and the devotional in, or at any rate for, the West. Just as there are differences of temperament and aptitude between individuals, so also there are between races, and the Eastern peoples are on the whole more suited to an advaitic or metaphysical path, while the West on the whole requires a devotional path based on love and worship. Taoism is purely advaitic, and in general devotional paths are lacking in Chinese religion, whereas in the West both Judaism and Islam are primarily devotional, advaitic possibilities existing only in the esoteric interpretations of the Cabbalists and Sufis. So also, Buddhism, intended for the East, is advaitic, while Christianity, intended for the West, is dualistic and devotional.

This does not, of course, imply a total disqualification of all Westerners for an Advaitic path or of all Easterners for a devotional, and those writers who take it on themselves to declare the general inability of Westerners to follow an Eastern path are guilty of unjustified presumption. Indeed, the wish would seem to be father to the thought, inasmuch as they never express any doubts about Easterners being able to follow a devotional Western path. The inability is represented as purely one-sided and in favour of Western proselytism. In India, as was shown in the previous chapter, both types of path are fully developed. Meister Eckhart may be instanced as a Westerner who expressed pure Advaita in his teaching, while the many Easterners who have become converts to Christianity and Islam have chosen worship and devotion. Indeed, this is an age foretold in the scriptures when barriers are being overleapt and advaitic theory is being made known to the West, while many in the East are recoiling from it either to devotion or to pure materialism. However, we are dealing here with broad trends and particularly with the nature of Buddhism and Christianity.

The dualistic approach to Union and, through Union, to Advaita might have been provided for people of devotional temperament in Buddhism by the worship of Gautama Buddha, as it was in Hinduism by the worship of Rama or Krishna, while still leaving the advaitic doctrine for those who could understand and follow it, but this possibility was deliberately discarded and worship forbidden by the Buddha himself. When he announced that his death was approaching, Ananda begged him for instructions concerning the Order, but he bade them rely on themselves, seeking the Light inwardly. 'Therefore, Ananda, be lamps unto yourselves. Be a refuge to yourselves. Seek no outer refuge. Hold fast to the Truth as a lamp and a refuge. Look not to any one besides yourselves for refuge. . . . And whoever, Ananda, either now or when I am dead, shall be a lamp to themselves and seek no outer refuge but, holding fast to the Truth as

their lamp and their refuge, shall not look for refuge to any besides themselves, they it is among my disciples, Ananda, who shall attain the supreme height. But they must have great desire to learn.'

It is held that the Buddha cannot be worshipped because, through Nirvana, he has merged with the Absolute, and yet, strange though it may appear, this is really a question of the point of view of the worshipper, for he was already in Nirvana during his life on earth. If a man is Enlightened, death can bring no further Enlightenment. This was illustrated in recent times in the case of Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi. Being in a constant state of conscious identity with the Absolute, he would not make an assertion of duality. That means that he would not assert any relationship or call any his disciple. But when a disciple appealed to him in distress on this account he admitted that, from the point of view of the disciple, the relationship is a real one. 'The Guru or Enlightened One sees no difference between himself and others. For him all are Enlightened, all are one with himself, so how can he say that such and such is his disciple? But the unliberated person sees all as multiple, he sees all as different from himself, so to him the Guru-disciple relationship is a reality and he needs the Grace of the Guru to waken him to Reality.'¹

Christianity, on the other hand, might have developed an advaitic school on the basis of Christ's saying 'I and my Father are One' combined with St. Paul's saying 'You are all sons of God in Christ', or simply on the basis of the saying that the kingdom of heaven is within you, for if the kingdom of heaven, why not the kingdom of earth also? It is only to the materialist that earth is more real than heaven. If a Christian believes in the Christ in him and heaven in him, it should be easy for him conceive of identity with the Universal Self within which the panorama of the universe

¹ *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge*, pp. 141-2, by Arthur Osborne. Rider & Company.

passes by; but he has not done so. With the rarest exception, even Christian saints and mystics stop short at duality and even in speaking of the Mystic Union speak like Tukaram in the verse quoted in the previous chapter, as the lover remaining separate from the Beloved. D. T. Suzuki, the great exponent of Zen Buddhism to the West, has tried to show that the two religions converge at the summit and has indeed produced Christian statements implying pure Advaita, such as: 'God's isness is my isness' and 'Thou shalt lose thy thyness and dissolve in his hisness; thy thine shall be his mine, so utterly one mine that thou in him shalt know eternalwise his isness, free from becoming: his nameless nothingness.'¹ However, his attempts fall down over the difficulty that he has been able to gather such statements only from one Christian mystic, Meister Eckhart. They are enough, certainly, to show that advaitic possibilities exist in Christianity, as indeed they must in every spiritually complete religion, and, as will become evident from Chapter 5 of the present book, he could have added the testimony of other Christian mystics also; but they are not ground enough to argue that these possibilities have been generally developed or recognized; in fact they are the exception which proves that they have not.

Reverting, then, to our thesis that Buddhism and Christianity provide different but complementary solutions for East and West, it may be objected that this implies divine guidance of human affairs, in fact of history. It does. All religion does. If there is divine guidance, then, as Christ said, not even a sparrow can fall to the ground without the divine will; if not, then all is a monstrous congress of accidents, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing. There is no middle possibility. Either the life of a man, a nation, mankind, the universe, follows a pattern to a prescribed end or it is without meaning, sense or purpose. It is one of the wonders of our age that people—not merely individuals but

¹ *Mysticism, Christian and Buddhist*, p. 51, by D. T. Suzuki. Allen & Unwin.

whole communities—who profess to believe in a Teacher who told them that the very hairs on their head were numbered, who forbade them to plan for the morrow, who said that not even a sparrow could die without the divine will, should take it for granted that they themselves are the makers of history and that everything comes about either by accident or by human planning. What makes the irony more piquant is that that half of the world which no longer believes in any God believes man's history to be blindly planned without a planner, while the half which professes to believe in God regards it as unplanned. To hold such a view while professing to accept the teaching of Christ shows a remarkable facility for not drawing consequences.

The objection may be raised that only a dualistic religion can postulate divine guidance and not Advaita. How, it may be asked, can one postulate guidance without a Guide? Such an objection is one of those feats of rationalism which look clever but have in fact no meaning, since the objection itself is possible only from the standpoint of duality and not of Advaita. As long as one identifies oneself with the ego the guidance remains; insofar as one identifies oneself with the Self one contains the universe with its guidance and the question does not arise. The guidance is not of the Self but of its manifested forms. Put thus, the idea of containing the universe may be overwhelming, but if the kingdom of heaven is within you, why not the kingdom of earth also? It is not the mind or the ego that contains the universe; so long as you are the ego it contains you. The Advaitin does not hold that the individual and the world exist blindly with no divine control but that they only appear to exist, since their ultimate Reality is the Self which creates and controls them. Insofar as the appearance is a reality, its guidance is also a reality.

While anticipating criticisms, reference may be made to another that is often heard, that if there were divine guidance in the affairs of the world and of a man there would be less

confusion in the former and suffering in the latter. However, guidance does not mean that all that happens must be immediately and obviously for the better. It is also no ground for complacency, since Christ told his followers that evil must needs come. And by his condemnation of those through whom it comes he implied that it would come through human agency. This saying is worthy of grave reflection, for it means that to say that the destiny of a man or the history of a nation or civilization runs to a plan does not mean that there is no responsibility for it. Actually, history or destiny works through the medium of cause and effect, and human activity is a part of the agency by which it comes about. Looking at the rise, flowering and decay of a past civilization, in which he is not blinded by sentiment, the historian can see this clearly enough. To take a concrete example: the Roman Empire became corrupt and effete, a civilization that had failed, and a historian of today can see that it had to perish and enumerate the causes. He can prove that its continued existence could not lie within the framework of history, and in doing so he will point to the human failings that caused its downfall, ascribing the blame for them to various individuals, groups and classes. He certainly would not suggest that it was overthrown by any extraneous accident, even so potent an accident as the warlike Germanic tribes on its borders. Similarly with the present civilization or any other. Its course is undoubtedly mapped out, but it will be brought about partly or wholly by human agency.

As for the question of individual suffering, it can be considered only in the context of man's purpose in life. It is usually posed on the assumption that man's purpose is an easy and carefree life, but religion does not accept this assumption. On the contrary, it presumes that his purpose is to approach God and ultimately to realize the Bliss of Divine Union. If this is so, then contentment with a worldly life is the great obstacle, since it withholds him from even attempting to attain his goal, and whatever makes a man

dissatisfied can be regarded as a boon since it may serve as an incentive to higher aspiration. There are some, of whom Gautama Buddha was an outstanding example, who reject worldly life as unsatisfactory even though it offers them a pleasant and carefree existence, but most men do not. They cling to it. Only failure or frustration uproots them and may perhaps turn their face towards a new goal. Therefore they not uncommonly find that they have more cause to thank God for suffering than for ease.

This is not to say that all suffering is good. It is not necessary to go from one extreme to the other. Although Truth is simple, life is infinitely complex. Each person has his destiny to work out and his problems to face. All that is claimed here is that it should not be taken for granted that whatever conduces to his ease and comfort is good and whatever disturbs it bad. One has not got the data to assess the value or necessity of suffering in any individual case; not only would it be necessary to know the person's innermost thoughts and tendencies but to locate the suffering within the framework of his whole life and, even more than that, this life within the framework of his entire existence. What one can do is to keep in mind the purpose of life and pronounce, if at all, in terms of that.

The religious viewpoint is that existence is a pre-ordained harmony containing death as well as birth, dissolution as well as creation, dark themes as well as bright. The word 'pre-ordained' does not mean that it is fashioned by any external ukase but by the law of cause and effect, just as is the physical universe. And the clause that evil must needs come does not mean that God is powerless to prevent evil but simply that, as in the example given above, what is evil in the immediate context may be a necessary part of the whole and therefore come within the divine plan. Manichaeism is mere shortsightedness. In the short range, evil seems to be at strife with good, but in the wider range this strife itself is merely the technique of creation and return,

of Divine Manifestations; and from the ultimate viewpoint of Advaita there is neither good nor evil but only the One Self.

This chapter began with consideration of a divine plan governing the destiny of mankind. There is general agreement among the religions and ancient traditions concerning this, although some express it more cryptically and others more openly. Some account of it will be helpful to our theme, and this will be made mainly in terms of Hinduism, in which it is, perhaps, most explicit, but with reference to Judeo-Christian traditions also.

It is that there are alternate phases, one being the manifestation of the universe with all its creatures and the other their return into the Unmanifest. These are known as the Day and Night of God or the breathing out and in of Brahman. 'From the Unmanifest all things are brought forth at the dawn of day, and at the oncoming of night they are merged again in that same Unmanifest.'¹

This great cycle, a Day of Brahma, is called a *kalpa*. It is divided into fourteen *manvantaras*, which are not merely periods of history but cycles or phases of manifestation, each *manvantara*, like an individual life, being a twofold process: the loss of innocence and the development of potentialities. The present *manvantara* runs from the state of virtual perfection known to the West as the Earthly Paradise to the actualized perfection referred to as the Heavenly Jerusalem. To indicate the virtual nature of its perfection, the Earthly Paradise is traditionally represented as circular, for the circle is symbolically the perfect form, no part of which strays farther from the centre than any other, like the perfect man who is not drawn out by desire or driven in by fear. On the other hand, the Heavenly Jerusalem is traditionally represented as foursquare in token of its stability. The mediaeval task of squaring the circle was, therefore, as explained by René Guénon, that master of traditional symbolism, no

¹ *Bhagavad Gita*, viii. 18.

mathematical fantasy but a symbol for stabilizing the virtual perfection of a man's nature and attaining the state equivalent to the Heavenly Jerusalem. He also explains that the symbolism of the Earthly Paradise in biblical and other references is very appropriately that of the vegetable world, where seeds germinate and potentialities are matured, whereas that of the Heavenly Jerusalem is that of the mineral world, of crystallized and stabilized perfection. But there is no ultimate and final perfection, no crystallization in a fixed state; there can be none short of Advaita or it would be a stabilization of duality; and therefore the Heavenly Jerusalem in which the potentialities of one *manvantara* are consummated serves as the Earthly Paradise from which those of the next germinate.

The course of mankind from leaving the Earthly Paradise is a twofold process. It is a 'fall' as described in the Bible, that is a movement outwards from spirituality and unity to materialism and dispersal, like the spreading out and cooling down of breath when one exhales, a movement towards ever greater subdivision and diversity, exemplified above all in material civilization, but accompanied by a spiritual decline. But at the same time it is an actualization of potentialities that were only latent in man. To some extent this process is illustrated in the life of an individual. He comes 'trailing clouds of glory' in the virtual perfection of childhood and then, as his ego develops with all its appetites, sinks into a state of imperfection equivalent to the 'fall' of man; and yet it is this very development which makes possible his ultimate stabilization in the conscious perfection of Realized Man. Only through the Fall is the Redemption possible. This has been expressed theologically in Christianity in the dogma that Adam had to sin in order that Christ could redeem mankind. So expressed it sounds naive and critics have not failed to attack it, but it will be seen from the above that it merely formulates a universal truth in a particular and picturesque manner.

The same outward and downward course accompanied by the development of potentialities is manifested in the history of any single religion as in that of mankind as a whole, and indeed in the smaller perspective of one religion it is much easier to perceive. The power and purity of the origin soon wanes but the latent possibilities are developed in arts and sciences, in philosophy and theology, and in elaborately detailed spiritual paths. Mediaeval Christianity, lacked the power and simplicity of the Early Church, just as Mahayana did of Primitive Buddhism, but in both cases a wealth of art and philosophy had been developed, spiritual implications had been formulated and varied techniques of spiritual training established. It will be observed, moreover, that art, literature and music are generally lacking at the beginning of a religion, as they were in Christianity, Buddhism, Taoism and Islam. They may be disapproved of, as in Taoism and Islam, or simply ignored, as by Christ and Buddha. They are unnecessary because men's energies are turned directly to spiritual effort. In later centuries, however, when the flame has cooled, such direct effort becomes rare and men are helped along more gradual paths by the diffusion of spiritual light through art, literature and philosophy.

The course of the cycle or *manvantara* is divided into four *yugas* or ages. These are the same as the gold, silver, bronze and iron ages of classical mythology. Some such doctrine of increasing obscuration through successive ages is almost universal. It is reflected in classical mythology in the stories of the dethronement of Uranus by Saturn and Saturn by Zeus as king of the gods. And it will be noted that although Saturn is represented as austere and malefic, the era of his domination is represented as a golden age in comparison with the present. The conditions of an age that is past cast a shadow over our times, demanding a discipline more severe than modern man will accept. The most cryptic reference to the four ages is in the Tao-Te-King, where it is

simply said that 'In the first age men have no rulers; in the second they love their rulers; in the third they fear them; and in the fourth they despise them.'

The *kali-yuga* or dark age, which is the shortest of the four ages, is said to have begun with the battle of Kurukshetra recorded in the *Bhagavad Gita*, some four thousand years ago and to be approaching its end now.

However, the downward movement is not uninterrupted. To represent a smooth, steady flow in one direction would be too much of a simplification. The whole process is governed by the three *gunas*, which can perhaps best be rendered as stresses or tendencies, both in cosmic and individual development. *Sattva* is the tendency to truth and peace and manifests as aspiration; its direction is upwards and its colour white. *Rajas* is the tendency to passion and activity; its direction is outwards and its colour red. *Tamas* is the tendency to darkness, ignorance and sloth; its direction is downwards and its colour black. It would lead us too far astray to go into the full philosophy of the *gunas*, but it is to be remarked that the downward and outward course of manifestation is periodically arrested and turned back by a sattvic intervention, normally taking the form of a spiritual teacher, who may be a Divine Incarnation. 'Whenever truth is obscured and darkness prevails I manifest Myself' Sri Krishna declared.¹ This process of periodic renewal also is to be seen on a smaller scale within each religion. Mediaeval Christendom is a constant example of it, as the great monastic orders were created to counteract the growing laxity, then the reforms associated with St. Bernard to purify and energize the monastic orders, then the Franciscan and Dominican Orders of Friars, to mention but the most outstanding.

The principal Divine Interventions are termed Avatars and are described in more or less symbolical terms. There are ten of these in the course of the *manvantara*, of which the

¹ *Bhagavad Gita*, iv. 7.

first and last must be common to all mankind, their functions being, respectively, to open and close the *manvantara*. The tenth has not yet come. The time for his advent is when materialism and confusion have dominated the world and the remnants of this cycle are swept into cataclysmic disaster, only the few who still follow a spiritual path being gathered together to form the nucleus of the next *manvantara*. The Tenth Avatar, who is to bring this about, is referred to merely as the 'Avatar of the White Horse'. It is worthy of note that the Buddhists also await the coming of the Maitreya Buddha, whose symbol is a white horse, and that the Christ at the Second Coming is depicted in the Book of Revelations as the Rider on the White Horse. Without digressing further into traditional symbolism, reference may also be made to the cult of the White Horse among the ancient Germanic and other peoples. At least in the three religions which we are considering, it refers to the same event although seen from a different angle.

The Seventh and Eighth Avatars, Rama and Krishna, were referred to in the previous chapter. The Ninth is predicted briefly as the Mleccha or 'foreign' Avatar. Hindus agree that he has already appeared, some identifying him with Buddha and others with Christ. The contention of this book is that the twofold movement of establishing a proselytizing religion based on a Divine Teacher, through Buddhism in the East and Christianity in the West, together constitutes the Ninth Avatar.

This theory should not be taken as any belittlement of either Buddhism or Christianity; on the contrary it is a confirmation of their truth and divine origin. When a Hindu refers to Christ as a Divine Avatar he is not being in any way derogatory; what he means is simply that he believes Christ to be God Incarnate just as he believes Krishna to be God Incarnate. If Christians have no difficulty in believing that Christ is the Messiah foretold by the Jews, they should equally have no difficulty in believing that he is the Avatar

foretold by the Hindus. There need be no rivalry or competition in Truth.

It might be objected, however, that Buddha was a Hindu and not a foreigner. Literally that is true; but the religion he founded was, so to speak, a foreign version of Hinduism adapted to the needs of foreign communities by being stripped of its specifically Hindu characteristics.

To return now to the question of spiritual decline: the theory of periodical sattvic intervention does not mean that the downward tendency can never prevail or that every religion must reach the winning post, so to speak. History is cluttered up with religions that have fallen by the way—those of ancient Egypt and of Pythagoras to mention only two. Their decline may take the form of the replacement of spiritual aspiration by animism, magic and the cult of psychic forces—a degeneracy against which, it will be recalled, the Hebrew Prophets were constantly at war; also a degeneracy which has beset some Buddhist countries today. And it may be remarked in parenthesis that those Westerners who, groping for spiritual guidance in a world of materialism, seek to establish contact with some religion of the past, Egyptian, Atlantean or other, instead of with a living spiritual current of today, are unlikely to find more than psychic residues, bereft of spiritual potency though not necessarily harmless. If real spiritual potency had remained the religion would not have succumbed.

On the other hand, the completion of the downward trend may result in crass materialism and the loss of spiritual paths, like rivers drying up in the desert. The result of this is a secular civilization with no spiritual basis for life, either public or private, and no spiritual scale of values. Material values are enthroned and moralism, which may have survived spirituality for a while, gives place to amorality. This is the type of spiritual decline which has arisen in the West in recent centuries and has overspread the world in the present century.

When a religion has strayed too far from its sources to be rejuvenated, the sattvic intervention can only take the form of its replacement by another. This explains why, at a certain stage in the course of the *manvantara*, proselytizing religions became necessary, one for the East and one for the West, and then, at a later date, a third to cover the Middle East between the two. When all the religions of the world have fallen into a decline, except for a small remnant in each or at any rate in some, will be the time for the Tenth Avatar.

Little is known of the pre-Buddhist creeds of Eastern countries, but there is evidence enough of their degeneracy from the fact that Hinduism, which is essentially a non-proselytizing religion, had already spread to Indonesia, Malaya and Indo-China before Buddhism arose. Of the previous state of Christendom, on the other hand, much is known, and the most striking thing about it is that religion had lost its power. Indeed, it was largely the picture of a materialistic secular civilization in ancient Greece and Rome which appealed so strongly to Renaissance Europe and has continued to delight the modern West. It has been taken as a norm, but in fact it was an exception and could not endure, being contrary to man's nature and a denial of his higher possibilities. It ended in material destruction and spiritual conquest by an alien creed. Here also there is evidence of the spiritual decline in the fact that mystery creeds from the Near East, such as Mithraism, had already begun to seep in. Rather timidly and apologetically, a Christian writer can recognize that conditions had become ripe for a proselytizing religion to sweep over the West. 'In his Epistle to the Galatians St. Paul says: "When the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son." The scientific historian may remain sceptical about a divine intervention at this stage in history; but that conditions were highly favourable for the advent of a new, satisfying religion is undeniable. Roman administration ensured a peaceful world in which men could travel unmolested to

and fro as they had never done before. There was an international language, Hellenistic Greek. Cosmopolitanism had broken down national prejudices and had suggested that there is a basic divine Reality behind all religions. The old faiths had lost their vitality, and, in any case, were inadequate to meet the yearnings of the human soul.¹

Since the theory of religious development set forth in this book seems directly contrary to the modern doctrine of progress, some explanation or justification seems necessary. In the first place, the ancient traditions are not so opposed to the doctrine of progress as might appear. They concur in representing primitive man as totally lacking in material civilization, the only difference being that they picture him as too wise to desire it, whereas the modern theory pictures him as too stupid to create it. Early Greek pastoral poetry, for instance, depicts the ancients in what anthropologists would call the food-gathering stage, only it idealizes their condition, where modern theory would have them brutish and unambitious, scraping together a bare subsistence and in constant danger from wild beasts. It is a question of sense of values—which is the birthright and which the mess of pottage. If men have always had the modern materialistic sense of values then it follows logically that only lack of ability and initiative can have prevented them from creating a materially convenient and elaborate, even if not highly mechanized, civilization. But have they? Students who themselves conceive of no higher sense of values will obviously not credit the ancients with one, but they may not be the best judges. In illustration of the supposedly brutish nature of primitive man, some students have pointed to survivals of food-gathering tribes in our own time, such as the Veddas of Ceylon. However, such a comparison is not wholly valid. In the individual, childhood is a delightful state, but a person who fails to develop, retaining a childish mentality while growing physically, becomes repulsive, and it may be so

¹ *Religions*, p. 64, by D. W. Gundry. Macmillan & Co. Ltd.

racially also. Moreover, the traditions all depict an age of much greater fertility in the dim past, which geological evidence may well confirm. Even apart from that, such food-gatherers or even nomads as may have survived into modern times are crowded out on to the marginal lands which their more enterprising neighbours have not found it worth their while to cultivate. Certainly the constant danger from wild beasts against which primitive man is supposed to have had to contend is a fiction invented by armchair theorists, because in fact it is not mechanized weapons which protect men from wild beasts so much as the dignity of the human state. Animals do not normally attack man or prey on him. From ancient times Indian Sages and their disciples have lived in the jungle with no protection, while when a beast does turn man-eater whole villages go in fear even in modern times, with firearms at their disposal.

What is asserted is that there is no progress in religion. There obviously cannot be in any religion with a single founder, for a Christian who claimed to have progressed beyond Christ would *ipso facto* cease to be a Christian. And the same applies equally to a Buddhist, a Muslim, a Taoist, a Confucianist, a Jain or a Zoroastrian. On the contrary the highest age of any religion is at its origin, after which there is a decline of pure spirituality, even though it may be accompanied by a development of arts and sciences and philosophy. This, as explained earlier, is a sort of fulfilment, a development of latent potentialities, but it certainly cannot be called progress.

Neither is there any ground for presuming a law of progress or upgrading from one religion to the next, each new one promulgated being higher than those that went before. In fact, they are not even spaced out in a way that any such law would demand, Taoism, Confucianism, Buddhism, Jainism, Zoroastrianism and Pythagoreanism being all more or less contemporaries. In any case, any Buddhist or Christian who sincerely held such a view would

have to become a Muslim, since Islam is the latest religion promulgated and, on such a theory, would have to be the highest.

This leaves only religions with no single originator and no known point of origin. Most of these are what it has been customary to term primitive, the religions of Negro tribes, Eskimoes, Australian Aborigines, Polynesians and so forth. However, as pointed out in the previous chapter, there is no more evidence for these being primitive origins than degenerate survivals, and the consensus of scholarship is now coming round rather to the latter view. There is certainly no ground for supposing that they are at a low stage of development and would have risen higher if left to themselves. Indeed, when degeneration is the universally observed process in the religions with a known historical origin, it would be illogical, to say the least, to presume an opposite process in those for which no evidence is available.

It is only on a study of Judaism and Hinduism among the surviving religions that there is some apparent ground for speaking of progress. However, the Hindus themselves do not admit that there has been any. They term their religion *sanatana dharma*, 'the eternal religion', and hold that the same doctrine of Advaita has been taught from the beginning, even though expressed in symbolical form that not all foreign scholars have recognized. Moreover, they still use the ancient Vedic hymns in their worship today. In Judaism also Jewish esoterists find the highest doctrine expressed symbolically in the ancient texts. It may often happen that the language used gives the modern reader a false impression. For instance, the saying 'The Lord thy God is a jealous God' has been widely quoted to depict a crude conception of a fierce tribal deity from which the Jews are later supposed to have risen to a higher conception, whereas in fact it expresses a truth recognized by mystics in all religions and reiterated by Christ, the truth that one cannot serve God and Mammon, that only whole-hearted,

single-minded devotion can attain to God; so long as a man's devotion is divided between God and wealth or fame or pleasure or any other desire, there will be no attainment.

Quite apart from historical evidence, however, there is an intrinsic reason, inherent in its very nature, why religion does not permit of progress. That is that religion is not concerned with new ideas evolved by successive prophets or philosophers, as the theory of progress presumes, but with Absolute Truth and the paths to its realization. A writer, for instance, who tries to explain what theory or doctrine was discovered by the Buddha through his Enlightenment simply shows that he does not understand what it is all about. One learns a theory from reading or thinking or arguing, not from spiritual practice or experience. Enlightenment means something very different; it means establishment in a state of Nirvana or Self-realization or whatever term one may choose to describe the Indescribable.

In fact, religion is more like science than philosophy, at any rate speculative philosophy as understood in the West. In such philosophy, each exponent works out his own set of theories and no other completely agrees with him, since they have no factual basis or universal quality but are purely personal. For the same reason, they cannot really benefit the community; they may prove an interesting toy for intellectuals, on a par with chess or crossword puzzles, but they do not provide a pattern of life or a technique of self-development. Being purely mental, they do not even benefit the exponent himself. They do not make him wiser in life or more serene in character; nor do they give him additional powers, as a spiritual practitioner may acquire supernatural powers or a physical scientist the power to fly in the air or speak to people at a distance or light a room without fire.

Religion, like physical science, conducts experiments and produces results; only, being a science for inner development, its experiments are conducted within a man; he himself is the laboratory. This was the alchemy of the Middle

Ages, seeking to transmute the baser elements in a man into pure gold. It was a travesty based on ignorant imitators of the 'royal art' that represented it merely as an attempt to turn physical lead into gold.

'This thing for which you have sought so long is not to be acquired or accomplished by force or passion. It is only to be won by patience and humility and by a determined and most perfect love. For God bestows this divine and immaculate science on his faithful servants, namely on those on whom he resolved to bestow it from the original nature of things. . . . Nor were they able to hold anything back save through the strength granted to them by God. For God charges those of his servants whom he has purposely chosen that they keep this divine science which is hidden from men and that they keep it to themselves. This is the science that draws its master away from the suffering of this world and leads to the knowledge of future good.'¹

This does not mean that there was no physical experimentation, simply that the materials used had a symbolical value and the outer experiments accompanied an intricate inner process of purification, a process which involved self-knowledge and the development of latent powers and faculties.

There is one essential respect, however, in which religion differs from physical science, as the inner must from the outer. That is that the results are not cumulative but must be achieved anew by each practitioner from the beginning. This brings us back to the question of progress. Whatever spiritual aspirant undertakes the quest, whether through Christianity or Buddhism or any other religion, whether in the time of the prophets or centuries later, whether by a direct path or through some more intricate technique, he begins as a novice and nothing that has been previously achieved by experimenters in his own religion or any other

¹ Quoted by C. G. Jung from a mediaeval treatise in *Psychology and Alchemy*, p. 260.

can help him except as an incentive and encouragement, a spiritual influence and a signpost on the road that he alone must tread. There is no clearer assertion of this than the Buddha's parting injunction to his followers, quoted earlier in this chapter. The truth discovered is Absolute, not cumulative; it is not rational or theoretical truth so much as experience, like the discovery of a new land with a new way of living. Just as each aspirant must start from the beginning in his journey of discovery, so each can aspire to attain the goal or any stage upon the path to the goal, from the first illumination of the mystic, the first stabilization of the saint, to the Mystic Union of the devotional path and, beyond that, the undifferentiated Oneness of Nirvana.

It may be objected that I have been speaking of religion rather as a path for the elect than a way of life for the multitude, but a fully valid religion must contain both, and the former is the essence of it. There is a distinction both in Buddhism and Christianity between lay believers and those who renounce family and property in order to follow the path. If many of the latter no longer strive actively on a path to Realization, that is no dwindling in the religion but only unworthiness in those who follow it. The active level of a religion claims only a few, the minority who accept the dictum that 'The Lord thy God is a jealous God', who are referred to in the Gospels as 'the elect' and 'the salt of the earth', but it is through them that the spiritual potency of a religion is maintained and transmitted to the passive level of the multitude where at least it can harmonize their life and temper egoism with devotion. If a religion fails on its higher levels it will soon dry up on the lower levels also, giving place to materialism or animism. If the salt has lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted? This is what had happened in classical Greece and Rome and is happening throughout the world today.

This chapter has covered a wide range. Reference to the nature of religion, the course of the *manvantara* and the

inapplicability of the theory of progress to religion was necessary in order to indicate the position of Buddhism and Christianity in history. It now remains to examine their doctrine and show that they are in fact complementary and not contradictory.

Buddhism and Hinduism

THE Buddhist viewpoint is purely advaitic. This is shown in the doctrine of *anatta*, the unreality of the ego or individuality. On attaining Enlightenment the Buddha declared: 'Through countless births I have run, seeking but never finding the builder of the house. An ill fate it is to be born again and again. Now art thou discovered, thou house-builder. All thy rafters are broken and shattered thy roof-tree. My mind is freed from inclinations; the extinction of desire has been achieved.' This recalls the saying of the Hindu King Janaki on attaining Realization: 'At last I have discovered the thief who has been robbing me all these years.'

The house is the body or individuality in which one is confined for this present life. Its builder is the ego-sense. Its rafters are attachments and its roof-tree the I-am-the-body idea, and when these break the whole house collapses.

This gives rise to a number of questions. In the first place, does the collapse of the house imply death of the body? Obviously not, because the Buddha continued living and teaching for some fifty years after this. Some Hindus who do not follow an advaitic path or aspire to complete dissolution of the individuality and identity with the universal Self have expressed doubts as to whether the survival of the body is possible after Enlightenment, but to

the Self-realized Advaitin, whether Hindu *Jnani* or Buddhist Arahant, it is a matter of complete indifference whether he wears a body or not. Among the Hindus in modern times Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi both declared this in theory and exemplified it in fact.

Also, it might be asked: if the ego or individuality perishes, or rather if, according to the doctrine of *anatta*, it is discovered that there never was one, what remains? Who is it that says that he is freed from inclinations and desires or that he has caught the thief? There is a school of modern psychology which holds that there is no individuality, no soul or self or ego, no 'ghost in the machine' as it has been called, but merely an intricate physical machine which reacts according to automatic responses. Is it the same as that? Unintelligent or tendentious translators have sometimes made it appear so, using the word 'soul' in place of 'individuality' and asserting that Buddhism denies the existence of the soul, thereby giving the impression that it is materialistic and recognizes only the body. This is a complete travesty. It ignores the question: what remains? According to the mechanistic theory, nothing remains except a physical machine; whereas according to Buddhism something that can say 'I' and that is henceforth deathless does remain. It might be said that the state of Enlightenment or Nirvana remains, but what is that? Like all other spiritual Masters, Buddha refrained from trying to describe the indescribable. Being Liberation from all restrictions, it can be indicated, if at all, only negatively, and he did give some negative indications. 'Monks, there exists that condition wherein is neither the sphere of infinite space nor of infinite consciousness nor of nothingness, nor of neither-consciousness-nor-unconsciousness; where there is neither this world nor a world beyond nor both together nor moon and sun. Thence, monks, I declare, is no coming to birth; thither is no going from life; therein is no duration; thence is no falling; there is no rising. It is not something fixed, it moves

not on, it is not based on anything. That indeed is the end of ill.¹

It is specifically described as a 'condition', not a blank; and it is stated not to be unconsciousness, as a blank would be. In fact, this description is a rather laboured way of saying that it is an indefinable state, the method being to mention two opposites and then say that it is neither of them. Not only is it not one or the other of them; it is also not both or neither of them. It does not fall within the same order of conception.

Coming back, then, to our question: what remains? an answer might be suggested from the analogy of a dream. What survives of a dream when one wakes up? The answer is: the dreamer. Of the dream, nothing survives; of the dreamer, everything. Moreover, he does not become the dreamer but wakes up to the fact that he was the dreamer all along. A character in the dream who was unable to conceive of any existence outside the dream or of the personality of the dreamer and who put this question would not be likely to receive a satisfactory answer. Those who demand a definition of Nirvana put themselves in a like position.

Actually, many Western writers have discussed whether or not the Buddhist conception of Nirvana implies an absolute blank, the simple cessation of all life and consciousness, as envisaged by the materialist who believes in no after-life, and quite a number have come to the conclusion that it does. It does not. More than that: the very raising of the question betokens superficial or insincere study, since this is not a question that is open to doubt or discussion. On the contrary, it is stated constantly and without equivocation by all Buddhist and Hindu sources that the attainment of Nirvana is the Supreme Bliss. Also, for instance, the final instructions of the Buddha to his disciples quoted in the

¹ From the *Minor Anthologies of the Pali Canon*, quoted in *A Source Book in Indian Philosophy*. Edited by Radhakrishnan and Moore. Princeton University Press.

previous chapter promise the supreme Goal to those who strive inwardly, not mere cessation of being. Not only does it contradict the texts, but it is puerile to suggest that men should have renounced home and property and gone forth as homeless wanderers merely in order to attain a blank cessation of being.

Some scope, though no real excuse, for this misrepresentation of Nirvana may be found in the fact that Buddhism speaks rather of the relief of suffering than the attainment of Bliss. This has been represented as a pessimistic attitude, regarding life as some sort of penal servitude to which men are condemned again and again, one life sentence following another, until they can escape into blank nothingness. This would, of course, be a grotesque attitude if it were true, but it is not. Religions are not concerned with moods or attitudes such as optimism and pessimism but with Absolute Truth and the paths to it. There is a profounder philosophical reason for the emphasis on escape from suffering rather than attainment of Bliss. If the doctrine were to stress the attainment of Bliss, the question would arise: Who is to attain Bliss? As Christ said, it is only by laying down his life that a man can save it; when the ego is dissolved the state of Bliss remains, but the conception of attaining it would inevitably be twisted to the service of the ego, which seeks not to surrender but to enjoy, and it is in this way that a doctrine is corrupted and a path falsified. The false statement is: ego obtains Bliss; the true statement: ego dissolves; Bliss remains. It is safer to speak of escape from suffering; and in fact the ego is the suffering from which escape is made.

Nirvana is man's *swarupa* or true state and is merely covered over by the veil which in Hinduism is called ignorance, in Buddhism suffering and in Christianity original sin, the veil of the ego. When this is removed, Nirvana remains. It is not necessary to create or discover Truth but simply to remove the ignorance that hides it. It is like a mountain that stands immovable but is covered over by a cloud; there is

no question of discovering the mountain but only of removing the cloud.

Sai Baba, an Indian saint of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century who had both Hindu and Muslim followers and taught each in terms of their own religion, explained this as follows: 'Ignorance conceals the pre-existent Knowledge just as water plants cover over the surface of a pond. Clear away the plants and you have the water. You don't have to create it; it is already there.'¹ Buddha compared it to a man with a magic talisman hidden in his clothing, of which he is ignorant. 'He becomes poor and ragged and hungry and wanders away to far countries, but although he actually suffers from poverty he still possesses the talisman. One day a wise man tells the poor fellow about his talisman and straight away he becomes a millionaire. It is the same with your nature and your intuitive understanding. You must realize that this talent of Enlightening Essential Intellect does not have to be acquired from some difficult source but is already in your possession.'

The common use of the term 'Nirvana' by Western writers about Buddhism and of *Moksha* or *Mukti* by writers about Hinduism has helped to foster the idea of some difference between the two conceptions, but there is none. Both terms and others also are used for the Supreme State in both religions. It is important to insist on this identity of doctrine because, for some reason or other, the kind of speculation referred to above as to the meaning of Nirvana and suggestions that it implies mere cessation of being are much more common in dealing with Buddhism than Hinduism. All the statements quoted in Chapter Two of this book about the attainment of the Supreme Bliss apply exactly the same in Buddhism as in Hinduism. Also, it might be added in parenthesis that the English terms 'Enlightenment,' 'Liberation' and 'Self-realization' are all used alike in this book to denote Nirvana. One or another may

¹ *The Incredible Sai Baba*, p. 13, by Arthur Osborne. Rider & Company.

be used to suit the context, but there is no difference of meaning between them.

Another point on which there is complete agreement is that Nirvana is attainable during the life on earth as well as after death. This in itself is an answer to the question whether it implies a mere blankness of non-existence, since it is obvious that the Sage who has attained while still living, the Hindu *Jivan-Mukta* or *Jnani* or the Buddhist Arahāt, enjoys full consciousness. This also explains why Buddha was so chary of saying what happens after death. For the Advaitin, whether Buddhist or Hindu, it is not the body that is the obstacle to Nirvana but only the I-am-the-body idea. The illusion of separate individual existence has to be overcome, whether during this life or after, and when it is completely dissolved Nirvana remains. Just as there is the illusion of separate being now, so there can be after death, but it would be folly to dwell on it and describe the various forms it may take when what has to be done is to break through it to Reality. Sri Ramakrishna illustrates in his usual picturesque manner the possibility of Nirvana before death or after. 'If a clerk be imprisoned, when the term of his sentence is over and he comes out, tell me, will he pass his time in dancing for joy over his release or resume his work as clerk? So when the householder is liberated from the prison of the world, will he spend his life in rejoicing over his liberation? He may continue to perform his duties as householder if he so desires. He who has attained wisdom makes no distinction between this place and that place; to him all places are equal. He who has found God here has also found Him there. When the tail of a tadpole drops off, it can live both in water and on land. When the tail of ignorance drops off, man becomes free. He can then live both in God and in the world equally well.'¹

What annoys the rationalist is that a clear, concise description of Nirvana cannot be put within his grasp, but that

¹ *Memoirs of Ramakrishna*, pp. 75-6. Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, Calcutta.

is in the nature of things, for what transcends the reason cannot be grasped by it. It is the Peace that passeth understanding. Attempts to describe it seem to fall almost inevitably into one or another of two faults: either they sound slightly banal, as though what was being described was only the state of the good citizen and upright man, or they sound vague and paradoxical. Two such attempts are quoted below from a modern compilation, the former, which is Hinayana, falling rather into the first category and the latter, which is Mahayana, into the second.

'Nibbana is the result of the cessation of craving, of selfish desires. It may also be defined as the extinction of lust, hatred, and ignorance. The Pali word Nibbana is formed of *ni* and *vana*. *Ni* is a negative particle and *vana* means craving or selfish desire. Nibbana therefore literally means the absence of craving. The Sanskrit word Nirvana comes from the root *va* which means to blow, and the prefix *nir* which means off or out. Hence, Nirvana in its Sanskrit form means "the blowing out". It is understood to mean the blowing out of the flame of personal desire.

"The predominance of the negative explanation of Nibbana resulted in the mistaken notion that it is "nothingness" or "annihilation". However, in the Pitakas we find many positive definitions of Nibbana, such as Highest Refuge, Safety, Unique, Absolute Purity, Supramundane, Security, Emancipation, Peace, and the like. Nibbana is therefore not a negative concept because it is the cessation of craving, a "blowing out", for it is a blowing out of man's desires, and that blowing out of desires leaves a man free. Nibbana is freedom, but not freedom from circumstances; it is freedom from the bonds with which we have bound ourselves to circumstances. That man is free who is strong enough to say, "Whatever comes I accept as best."

'Freedom does not mean that one can do everything that can be imagined, that one can defeat a lion with a slap of the

hand. Freedom to do anything we wish is not freedom, for that means a return to the bondage of our wishes, our desires. Freedom means that one cannot be made a slave to anyone or anything, because one is free from personal desire, free from resentment, anger, pride, fear, impatience—free from all craving. Such a man's binding emotions have been blown out like so many candles. That man is free here on earth. He has reached Nibbana in this world.¹

The faint suggestion that this might be merely the state of the stoic or upright citizen is totally removed by the following, more philosophical definition.

'Nirvana is identical with Supreme Enlightenment, with the gaining of the Threefold Body of Buddhahood, and with the cessation of birth. Nirvana is the complete cessation not only of sorrow, but also of its cause. It is the cessation of delusion, attachment, hatred, and of the holding of inconsistent views; it is the cessation of all clinging to the false idea of an ego-personality.

'The nature of the perfect Nirvana being difficult to conceive or explain, one has to realize it for oneself. It is a subjective state of purity produced by the complete cessation of mental defilements. In it there is no place for either attachment or non-attachment, either to the self or to the not-self. It is not an objective reality into which men enter and rest, nor is it a particular mental state. It is pure, eternal, unchanging, unextended, nonsubstantial, quiescent, attributeless, unacquired, and devoid of unsupported cause and condition. It is emptiness but not nothingness, calm but not compassion, selfless but not the Supreme Reality. It is not consciousness (for it is devoid of the five skandhas), nor unconsciousness, nor both, nor neither. It cannot be spoken of as existent, for it is noncompounded, nor nonexistent, for within the sphere of subjective experience it is a reality. At

¹ 'The Fundamental Principles of Theravada Buddhism,' by U Thittila, from *The Path of the Buddha*, pp. 111-12, edited by Kenneth W. Morgan. The Ronald Press Company, New York.

the same time it transcends the limits within which distinctions are made between elements and between space and time. Furthermore, if it were nonexistent the practice of good deeds, contemplation, and meditation would be fruitless.

‘The negation of both existence and nonexistence must be cognized either empirically or by means of transcendental intuition (*prajna*). Empirical knowledge needs some tangible attributes to take hold of—but Nirvana has no such attributes. Transcendental intuition has only the void, essencelessness (*sunyata*) for its object—consequently it cannot cognize Nirvana as being either existence or nonexistence, for such a characterization constitutes a definite essence. Being without origination, formless and indescribable, Nirvana is not to be cognized even as the negation of existence and nonexistence. Nirvana really consists in the avoidance of the notion that “Nirvana exists”.

‘Although Nirvana is not produced by the Path, it can be attained by following the Path. In the ultimate analysis, the following of the Path and the attainment of Nirvana are illusions having no basis in reality. One should take as one’s aim simply the getting rid of all misconceptions about the existence and nonexistence of beings and things and the realization of the essentially nondual nature of all phenomena whatsoever. Nirvana is not to be eradicated like the passions, nor attained like the fruits of saintship. It consists in the avoidance of all notions of eradication and destruction—so long as the mind continues indulging in such notions there can be no Nirvana. Once this is realized, all attempts at particularization and definition cease. Nirvana is the complete disappearance of all figments of the imagination. Unless the ego-conception in all its forms is eradicated, beings will continue to assume the existence and nonexistence of things, which will result in endless suffering. When the ego-conception in all its forms is finally eradicated, that is

Nirvana, that constitutes the Triple Form of Enlightenment—the Highest Goal of Tibetan Buddhism.¹

The qualifying term 'Tibetan' is unnecessary in the last sentence; it constitutes the highest Goal of Buddhism in general, and of Hinduism and Taoism, the final realization of Advaita.

Before leaving the question of the possibility of attainment of Nirvana during the life on earth (which, after all, is fundamental for an understanding of Buddhism and of the doctrine of Nirvana) it should further be added that this is specifically stated in the official fourfold division of those who strive actively on the Noble Eightfold Path. This Path is divided into four stages. The first is that of the stream-farers, of those who have entered upon the stream through companionship with the pure, through hearing and reflecting upon the doctrine and through virtuous living. They have taken refuge in the Buddha, the Doctrine and the Order and, having done so, have recognized the Four Noble Truths: that there is suffering, that there is a cause for suffering, that there is a cure for suffering, and that there is a path to this cure. That is to say, they have consented within themselves that desire begets suffering, and that elimination of ego, and thereby of desire, ends suffering and have conceived of their religion as a path to perfection. The second stage is of those who will need to return to the earth only once more and in their next birth will attain final release. Already they have succeeded in minimizing desire and resentment and almost eradicated their attachment to the world. The third stage is of those who will not need to return to earth again but will attain Enlightenment in the present life or in the transition of death. The fourth is of those termed Arahats in Hinayana Buddhism and Bodhisattvas in Mahayana, the *Jnani* or *Jivan-Mukta* of Hinduism, who has attained Liberation while still living.

¹ *Buddhism in Tibet*, by Lobsang Phuntsok Lhalungpa, pp. 305–6 of the same symposium.

The doctrine of the unreality of the ego is contained within the doctrine of Nirvana. The latter implies the former. However, this is the main point on which theorists have claimed to find a contradiction between Hinduism and Buddhism and therefore it must be examined here. It is said that Hinduism postulates a *jivatma* or individual being that is reborn time after time until finally attaining extinction in Nirvana, whereas the Buddhist doctrine of *anatta* denies this and represents rebirth simply as the transmission of an impulse, as, for instance, when one billiard ball strikes another, the second ball having no identity with the first but simply continuing on a course given by it. Actually, however, Hindu Advaita, as indicated in Chapter 2 of this book, is equally categorical about the non-existence or unreality of the ego. The whole purpose of the technique of Self-enquiry as taught, for instance, by Ramana Maharshi, is to lead to the realization that in fact there is no ego. He taught that from the union of the Self or Universal Being with the body there arises an illusory being, the ego, which partakes partly of the nature of pure Consciousness and, partly of the nature of the body. The ego is real for him who takes it for a reality and believes in its existence, just as a dream is real as long as one continues to dream it, but ultimately it is unreal. The thing to do is not to argue whether the world or ego is real or unreal but to try to realize one's true Self beyond duality. As it says in the Bhagavad Gita: 'There is no existence of the unreal and no non-existence of the Real.'¹ If asked about rebirth, the Maharshi might say: 'If you are born now you will be re-born.' He also said that it is only necessary to disrealize unreality and Reality will remain. The unreality is the ego which was born and will die, and it is that which the Buddhist doctrine of *anatta* denies. To say that there is no ego or that it is an unreality and an illusion comes to the same thing.

Reverting once more to the question of survival after

¹ ii. 16.

death, because it is the point that has been so constantly misrepresented: this is not a denial of the soul's survival after death. Death is of no doctrinal importance to the Advaitin, whether Hindu or Buddhist. If there is an ego now, there will be after death; but if it is only an illusion now it will still be only an illusion after death. The thing to do is to realize its unreality now. And then what will survive after death? The question has already been answered: what survives when a man wakes up from a dream? Of the dream nothing; of the man everything. He is as he already was, but during the dream he had forgotten it. It is the inability of the critics to conceive of Self-realization in this life, in what Meister Eckhart calls 'God's timeless now', that has led them to create a non-existent problem about the Buddhist doctrine of what comes after death. Nothing comes; what is is.

It is a striking fact that Buddha never met an Advaitic Sage, that is an exponent of the Hindu standpoint who was capable of putting it in a really authoritative way based on realization. Whether it was that there was a temporary obscuration of Hinduism during his lifetime or that the Sages held aloof in order, as Christ might have put it, that the scriptures might be fulfilled, the result was the same: that it was never demonstrated that, so far as India was concerned, the new religion was doctrinally a redundancy. On leaving home in search of Enlightenment, Gautama, who was to become the Buddha, followed the usual course of attaching himself as a disciple to a Hindu guru. (And incidentally, this is a striking confirmation of the fact that, contrary to what is sometimes supposed, Kshatriyas as well as Brahmins were accepted as disciples.) Earnest seeker that he was, he was not satisfied with the training he received and transferred himself to a second guru. Here also he was dissatisfied and he wandered away, determined to seek the supreme Realization by himself.

Both these gurus seem to have taught orthodox doctrine

and to have prescribed legitimate practices but to have lacked complete Enlightenment. A man cannot normally guide others farther than he has gone himself, and therefore in both cases Gautama was dissatisfied. He later criticized the teaching of Alara Kalama, the first of his two gurus, but his criticism really seems to touch Alara's imperfect realization of the doctrine rather than the doctrine itself. That certainly is the conclusion of Ananda Coomaraswamy, one of the great exponents of Buddhism to the modern West.

'Alara,' he writes, 'taught, it is clear, the doctrine of the Atman, saying that the Sage who is versed in the Supreme Self, "having abolished himself by himself", sees that naught exists and is called a Nihilist: then, like a bird from its cage, the soul, escaping from the body, is declared to be set free: this is that Supreme Brahman, constant, eternal, and without distinctive signs, which the wise who know reality declare to be Realization. But Gautama . . . ignores the phrase "without distinctive signs" and with verbal justification quarrels with the animistic and dualistic terminology of soul and body: a liberated soul, he argues, is still a soul and, whatever the condition it attains, must be subject to re-birth, "and since each successive renunciation is held to be still accompanied by qualities, I maintain that the absolute attainment of our end is only to be found in the abandonment of everything."'¹

After Gautama, by attaining Enlightenment, had become the Buddha, he decided that the first two persons to whom he owed an exposition of the doctrine and the path were his two former gurus. Projecting his thoughts to them, however, he realized that they had both died already. This means that Alara never had an opportunity to answer the above criticism, and in this way also a comparison of the two doctrines was prevented. Let us strip it, so far as possible, of philosophical terminology and see where, if anywhere, the difference lies.

¹ *Buddha and the Gospel of Buddhism*, p. 21. Asia Publishing House, Bombay.

Hinduism teaches that the human soul or individual being is nothing-other-than the Absolute, thereby holding out the resplendent possibility, which Gautama realized in his Enlightenment, of conscious Identity with the Absolute in the state called Nirvana, all restrictions and limitations having disappeared, the state which Christ described in more human terms as 'I and my Father are One'. It is clear from the quotation given above that Alara taught this pure and universal doctrine. The Sage, 'having abolished himself by himself' (having destroyed the illusion of separate individual reality) 'sees that naught exists and is called a Nihilist' (perceives the unreality of the manifested universe and is an Advaitin, a discoverer of non-duality). 'Then, like a bird from its cage, the soul, escaping from its body, is set free' (the soul escapes from the illusory ego-sense into the freedom of pure Consciousness). 'This is that Supreme Brahman, constant, eternal and without distinctive signs' (*Nirguna*, Unknowable, as distinct from *Brahma Saguna*, the Qualified or Personal God possessing Attributes, through Whom the Absolute manifests as Creator) 'which the wise who know Reality declare to be Realization' (which is Identity with the Absolute).

The fault is not in the doctrine but in Alara's incomplete realization of it. Buddha's criticism of it was that 'the absolute attainment of our end is only to be found in the abandonment of everything' and that 'a liberated soul is still a soul and, whatever the condition it attains, must be subject to re-birth', as Coomaraswamy puts it. Hindu doctrine, however, never denies this, as can be seen by referring once again to Ramana Maharshi, the modern exponent of Advaita. He taught that absorption in the Self can be temporary or complete, *nirvikalpa* or *sahaja*. *Nirvikalpa samadhi* he likened to a bucket lowered into a well: the water in the bucket is united with that in the well, but the rope and bucket (the ego and its attachments) still exist to draw it out again. *Sahaja samadhi* he likened to a river flowing into the

ocean, whose waters become inseparably fused with those of the ocean. The former is a state of blissful trance which cannot be permanent; the latter is permanent, immutable Bliss, not requiring even trance but co-existing with outer human awareness. This is Nirvana, the supreme and ultimate attainment. It is extremely rare even among the saints. 'Among thousands, there is perhaps one who worships Me truly. Among thousands who worship Me truly, there is perhaps one who knows Me as I am.'¹ It seems clear that Alara had not attained to this ultimate state and that his disciple Gautama could not rest content with anything less.

As long as there are *vasanas*, that is cravings, tendencies or inclinations, the soul has not abandoned everything and therefore cannot attain to *sahaja samadhi*, as the Maharshi taught. They constitute the rope and bucket which will pull it back from *samadhi* to individual consciousness and will also pull it back after death to some new incarnation. Therefore, whatever blissful experiences it may have, it is not Liberated. This is Buddha's criticism: 'I maintain that the absolute attainment of our end is to be found only in the abandonment of everything.' But this, as just shown, is Hindu teaching also. Not only things but the very desire for things must be given up. Theoretically the doctrine taught by Alara implies this, only, not having achieved it in practice, he could not teach it with authority. Such also is the view of Coomaraswamy, who concludes: 'The distinctions between early Buddhism and Brahmanism, however practically important, are thus merely temperamental; fundamentally there is absolute agreement that bondage consists in the thought of I and Mine, and that this bondage may be broken only for those in whom all craving is extinct. In all essentials Buddhism and Brahmanism form a single system.'²

¹ *Bhagavad Gita*, vii. 3.

² *Buddha and the Gospel of Buddhism*, p. 219. Asia Publishing House, Bombay.

There is no contradiction, then, between Buddhism and Hinduism; however there is an apparent internal contradiction within each of them, since both of them teach the unreality of the ego for those who are capable of understanding Advaitic doctrine and following the direct path that it implies, and yet presume the reality of the ego for those who are not. Hinduism, as I showed in Chapter Two of this book, does this quite openly through the path of devotion. Indeed, the same Master may speak in terms of one or the other theory according to the level of understanding of the listener. It is no use complaining that this is inconsistent, because his purpose is not to construct a rational system for philosophers to play with but to help the spiritual development of those who come to him by whatever means their temperament and understanding requires. He is like a doctor who prescribes different treatment for different ailments.

Buddhism, as already pointed out, has no clear and open dualistic path. Therefore it has to make provision in some other way for those who cannot conceive of the unreality of the ego. So long as they cling to its reality in this life, they have to be shown the posthumous effects upon it of their actions and mode of living. This has been done by developing an elaborate cosmology with a doctrine of heavens and hells. Particularly in Mahayana Buddhism (as may be seen from sculptured friezes on stupas such as the Borobudur) there is a gradation of heavens and hells remarkably reminiscent of that of Mediaeval Christendom. This has been represented by some writers as a degeneration and betrayal of Buddha's teaching, but it is not. His Hindu background served, so to speak, as an Old Testament for his doctrine, as the Hebrew background did for that of Christ, and therefore whatever he did not specifically repudiate in it must be held to have been accepted by him. And he did not repudiate the doctrine of heavens and hells and gods and demons. Indeed, he referred to it and thereby confirmed it

on a number of occasions, indicating, for instance, that a certain course of action would lead to rebirth in a certain heaven. It is reported also that he visited his dead mother in the heaven in which she was established in order to give her the true teaching. The Jataka Tales, tales of the previous incarnations of the Buddha, and in many cases of certain of his followers also, are mainly symbolical, but they do nevertheless presume belief in a being who can have many incarnations. And indeed, the popular understanding of Buddhism certainly is that a man is dragged back to life after life until he realizes the unreality of it all.

There is an episode which remarkably illustrates this dual attitude in Buddhism. When his death was approaching, the Buddha told Ananda that pilgrimage should be made to four places: to the place where he was born, the place where he attained Enlightenment, the place where he first proclaimed his teaching and the place where he passed away. He promised, furthermore, that all those who died while making such a pilgrimage with a faithful heart should be reborn in one of the heavenly worlds, not on earth. Ananda went on to ask what should be done with the remains of the Buddha after his death, but he was rebuked for this: 'Do not distract yourselves, Ananda, by honouring the remains of the Tathagata. I beg you, Ananda, to strive on your own behalf. Dedicate yourselves to your own spiritual welfare. There are lay disciples who will do due honour to the remains of the Tathagata.'

At first sight this appears contradictory—first to express approval of pious activity and then to rebuke someone for interest in it—but really it shows a significant distinction between those who strive inwardly for the realization of Nirvana and those who follow a path of action which will be rewarded by action, that is by a heaven, a higher state of formal existence. It is analogous to Christ's distinction between those who live by the law and will be paid back to the uttermost farthing and those who live by love. Action can

lead to action, but it cannot lead beyond action. The performance of pilgrimage with a sincere heart can lead to heaven but it cannot lead beyond heaven to the realization of Nirvana, within which heaven and earth and hell are an illusory appearance. For that only inward-turning meditation is effective and therefore Ananda and the monks are told to strive inwardly and leave the path of action and its rewards to others.

There is a story in Hindu mythology which illustrates the same point of doctrine. A group of Rishis were living in the forest, practising various rites in the hope of attaining Self-realization. Lord Siva appeared to them in the guise of a sadhu and, after various encounters, convinced them of his superior powers. They then implored him for guidance and he explained to them that it is impossible to transcend action by means of action. The story, with its attendant circumstances, was written as a Tamil poem by the eminent modern poet Muruganar, but when he came to the passage giving Siva's instructions to the Rishis he requested Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi to write it for him. This he did in thirty verses which, under the title 'Upadesa Saram' or 'Essence of Instruction', are included in the English edition of the *Collected Works* of the Sage:

The results of action pass away and yet leave seeds
which cast the agent into an ocean of action. Action
does not bring Release.

But actions performed without any attachment, in the
spirit of service to God, cleanse the mind and point
the way to Release. (vv. 3, 4).

The Buddhist attitude to the heavenly worlds is the same as the Hindu; that is, as the Maharshi has been heard to say: 'They are as real as this world here.' As long as one is obsessed with the reality of one's ego and therefore of this world, so long will the law of cause and effect hold and

shape one's conditions in posthumous worlds. But it is better to abide in the Self and not to worry about either this world or the next. There is a story that illustrates this. Several years after his Enlightenment messengers came to the Buddha from his father requesting him to honour his home town also with a visit. He did so and was not without honour in his own home. In fact, a large number of the nobles renounced the world and followed him. Among these was his half-brother Nanda (not to be confused with his cousin Ananda, the beloved disciple). Nanda, however, was half-hearted about it. He had made the renunciation on the eve of being married to a beautiful girl and proclaimed heir to the throne and he fell to brooding over all that he had missed. Seeing that he had no zeal, the Lord asked him what was the matter and whether he was not already thinking of abandoning the path and returning to the life of the world.

Nanda replied: 'My Lord, when I left home a Sakya girl, the loveliest in the land, looked back at me with her hair half combed and said: "May you soon be back, young sir." It is because I am continually thinking of her that I have no zest for the Brahma path but have come to dislike it and wish to give up the training and return to a worldly life.'

The Buddha then took him by the arm and immediately the grove in which they were standing disappeared and they found themselves in the celestial world of the *devas*. As many as five hundred dove-footed celestial nymphs were attending on Sakra, the Lord of the *devas*. The Buddha asked Nanda which he found more charming and attractive, the Sakya girl who was the loveliest in the land or these five hundred dove-footed nymphs.

He replied: 'My Lord, compared with them the Sakya girl, although the loveliest in the land, would look like a monkey with its nose and ears cut off. She is not worth a particle of them. She can't be compared with them. The

five hundred dove-footed nymphs are incomparably more charming and attractive.'

Thereupon the Lord took Nanda by the arm again and they found themselves back in the grove as before.

Such a story might come from almost any religion; it is the sequel to it that illustrates the spirit of Buddhism. The rumour spread among the monks that Nanda was treading the path for the sake of heavenly nymphs and that the Buddha had promised him five hundred dove-footed maids. Thereupon they began to despise and mock him, calling him a mercenary. This so shamed him that he shut himself up alone and devoted himself with all his energy to the path, not allowing his thoughts to stray either to the Sakya girl or the nymphs or to his companions or anything else, with the result that he soon attained Enlightenment.

Were the nymphs real? As real as the Sakya maid; but what is reality? That is the whole object of the quest.

This dual standard of doctrine did lead to apparent contradictions. One of the most commonly used names of the Buddha is 'The Compassionate', and one of the fundamental concepts of Mahayana Buddhism is the Bodhisattva who is advanced enough to cross the threshold into complete Nirvana but refrains from doing so out of compassion for suffering mankind, vowing that he will not enjoy his own salvation until he can take others with him also. This conception involves the postulate of ego and others and is openly dualistic. From the point of view of Advaita it is a sentimentalized doctrine which has fallen below the high, serene level of the pure truth. And indeed, some have criticized Mahayana Buddhism on this ground, accusing it of abandoning the true teaching. Actually, it is only making provision for those who require an emotional approach, while retaining the pure Advaitic teaching for those who can follow it. The famous Diamond Sutra makes it quite clear that the doctrine of compassion is only a façade for the ignorant, since in reality there are no others

to whom to be compassionate. 'The Lord Buddha continued: Do not think, Subhuti, that the Tathagata would consider within himself: I will deliver human beings. That would be a degrading thought. Why? Because really there are no sentient beings to be delivered by the Tathagata. Should there be any sentient beings to be delivered by the Tathagata, it would mean that the Tathagata was cherishing within his mind arbitrary conceptions of phenomena such as one's own self, other selves, living beings and an universal self. Even when the Tathagata refers to himself, he is not holding within his mind any such arbitrary thought. Only terrestrial human beings think of selfhood as being a personal possession. Subhuti, even the expression "terrestrial beings" as used by the Tathagata does not mean that there are any such beings. It is only used as a figure of speech.'¹ Nevertheless, the quotation given in this connection on page 27 shows how easy it is for exponents of Buddhism to fall into the trap of apparent duality through such a conception.

This insistence on the law of cause and effect for those who cannot transcend it explains why the doctrine of merit is so highly developed in Buddhism. Actually, it is a fundamental teaching in all religions that as a man ploughs so will he reap, whether it be represented as reward for good deeds and punishment for sins, as in Christianity and Islam, or as a mere law of cause and effect, like the Hindu law of karma. In Buddhism it is of the same nature as in Hinduism, although there are schools, notably in Tibet, where the picturesque element of judgment and horrible punishment is developed. However, it is true that the idea of doing good in order to accumulate merit, like an investment that will pay dividends after death, is peculiarly prominent in Buddhism. It has been criticized by some Christian writers as a form of sublimated egoism inferior to doing good

¹ *A Buddhist Bible*, pp. 91-2. Edited by Dwight Goddard. Harrap and Co., Ltd.

without thought of reward either in this life or the here-after. The criticism is apt, but it does not refer to Buddhism, only to the popular Buddhism of those who, having failed to understand and follow the doctrine of Nirvana, seek rewards by action within the realm of action. And within this realm they are justified and will be paid back to the uttermost farthing.

There is a remarkable story which illustrates this. Bodhidharma, the 28th Indian and first Chinese Patriarch of Mahayana Buddhism, who founded the purely contemplative school from which Japanese Zen Buddhism later emerged, 'sailed for China, arriving in A.D. 520. The Emperor Wu at once invited him to his capital, the modern Nanking. On his arrival the Emperor, a most devout Buddhist, began to boast of his good works. "I have built many temples and monasteries," he said. "I have copied the sacred books of the Buddha. I have converted Bhikkus and Bhikkunis.¹ Now what is my merit?" To which this silent, ferocious-looking Indian Buddhist replied, "None whatever, your Majesty!"

"The Emperor, taken aback at this brutal answer, tried again. "What is to be considered as the First Principle of the Dharma?" he asked. "Vast Emptiness and nothing holy therein," replied the Patriarch. "Who, then," asked the Emperor, not unreasonably, "now confronts me?" "I have no idea," said Bodhidharma.²

Hearing the principle of merit denied, the Emperor quite naturally asks what, then, is the first principle of the doctrine; and he is told that it is Nirvana, which is empty of any ideas or qualities, even of the conception of holiness. His understanding is keen and he immediately replies with the question: 'If there is only the Emptiness, how can there be you and me? Who are you that tell me about it?' Bodhidharma's reply is not a confession of ignorance or agnosticism.

¹ Monks and nuns.

² *Zen Buddhism*, pp. 33-4, by Christmas Humphreys. Allen & Unwin.

It gives the profounder import of the Taoist saying: 'He who speaks does not know; he who knows does not speak.' Or, as the Maharshi taught, true Knowledge is that state which is beyond the duality of knowledge and ignorance. The question really meant: Is this a human individual or one who has transcended? And the reply referred to the ultimate state beyond the trinity of knower, knowledge and known.

Christianity and Buddhism

THE purpose of this chapter is neither to attack nor defend Christianity nor even to assess its spiritual value or worldly achievement, but simply to investigate how far it accords with Hinduism and Buddhism. Only insofar as any features in it do not accord but seem to constitute a contradiction will it be necessary to examine them to see whether they really are contradictory and whether they can be accepted as true Christian doctrine.

In temperament there is an utter difference between Christianity and Buddhism, Christianity being as completely devotional and dualistic as Buddhism is metaphysical and advaitic. It is the worship of a Personal God and His Incarnation in human form. Where Buddhism seeks the dissolution of the illusory ego in the state of Supreme Reality, Christianity seeks the beatification and perpetuation of the purified ego in adoration of the Personal God. Despite the superficial resemblances noted in the first chapter of this book, the divergence in doctrine and temperament is so great that one might be tempted to doubt whether any agreement between them was at all possible were it not for the sight of the two types of religion existing side by side in Hinduism, mutually recognized and sometimes even taught by the same Master, according to the temperament and aptitude of his disciples. It can, however, be shown that they lead to the same goal, for through self-naughting and

the love of God the soul can come, as Christian mystics know, to the Mystic Union; and through the union of two comes the final state of Oneness proclaimed by Meister Eckhart and experienced by a few of the greatest mystics; and this is Nirvana.

Although so diversely appavelled that their identity is not immediately recognizable, the same fundamental doctrines do exist in both religions. In fact, the fundamental teaching of every religion is the same: that egoism, by strengthening the ego, leads to suffering and alienation from Divine Grace, whereas surrender of the ego leads to beatitude. This is taught in a devotional religion like Christianity as the doctrine of sin and rebellion against God's will on the one hand, which God punishes by condemning the guilty to hell, and on the other hand of obedience to God which is rewarded by blissful perpetuation of life in heaven. It is taught in Buddhism as a pure law of cause and effect: attachment to things causes a person to turn towards them and away from the Bliss of Nirvana, thereby dragging him back into a life of form, where ignorance and desire torment him. This is represented as a mathematical law of cause and effect and the torment as self-inflicted, but the resultant ethical teaching is the same. Moreover, as was mentioned in the previous chapter, there are schools of Buddhism, notably that of Tibet, which, for the general run of believers who will not follow the serene metaphysical teaching, represent demons and torments of hell every bit as lurid as those of Mediaeval Christianity. If this were inherently contrary to Buddhist doctrine it could not have developed. Indeed, as was also shown in the previous chapter, the Buddha himself accepted the doctrine of celestial and infernal states from his Hindu background.

Leaving aside such similarities, however, and confining ourselves to the main line of doctrine in the two religions, it can be shown that the Christian doctrine of original sin and redemption corresponds to the Four Noble Truths

that form the doctrinal basis of Buddhism: that there is suffering, that there is a cause for suffering, that there is a cure for suffering and that there is a path to this cure.

A person grows up in a state of spiritual ignorance, turned towards the transient and incomplete satisfactions of this life and away from the radiance of Divine Bliss. Since this means turning away from God, Christianity calls it sin. 'Sin is nought else, but that the creature turneth away from the unchangeable Good and betaketh itself to the changeable; that is to say, that it turneth away from the Perfect to "that which is in part" and imperfect, and most often to itself.'¹ But normally a sin is some culpable act that a man has performed or omitted to perform, whereas this is merely a state in which he has been born and brought up, and therefore, to indicate that it is not his culpability, it is called original or inborn sin. Buddhism, with its intellectual rather than emotional approach, calls this state suffering instead of sin, but the meaning is the same. Hindu Advaita, still more cool and impassive, calls it simply ignorance.

It is the state in which fallen man, that is man in this *kali yuga* or spiritually dark age, normally exists and from which he must strive to free himself. This is done by the infusion of Divine Grace, and therefore Christianity stresses the rôle of the Redeemer. 'All that in Adam fell and died, was raised up again and made alive in Christ, and all that rose up and was made alive in Adam, fell and died in Christ. But what was that? I answer, true obedience and disobedience. But what is true obedience? I answer, that a man should so stand free, being quit of himself, that is, of his I, and Me, and Self, and Mine, and the like, that in all things, he should no more seek or regard himself, than if he did not exist, and should take as little account of himself as if he were not, and another had done all his works. Likewise he should count all the creatures for nothing. What is there, then,

¹ *Theologica Germanica*, ii. Golden Treasury Edition.

which is, and which we may count for somewhat? I answer, nothing but that which we may call God.¹

The truth that there is suffering means simply that man 'turneth away from the unchangeable Good and betaketh himself to the changeable . . . and most often to himself'. In other words, he identifies himself with the body, which is perishable, and with the ego, which is insatiable, as a result of which he is subject to destiny which undermines his health, separates him from what he loves, yokes him with what he does not, and finally takes away his life.

The truth that there is a cause for suffering draws attention to the fact that it is only man's attachment to the transitory reality of mundane life that binds him to it and makes him vulnerable. These two truths together, therefore, are equivalent to the Christian dogma that man is living in a state of original sin and that this is the cause of the evils and frustration of life.

The second two truths correspond to the doctrine of Redemption. There is a cure for suffering; that is to say that there is a state of Divine Beatitude. And there is a path to it. This proclamation of the path is the essential part of every religion. Without that it remains mere theory or, at the best, an unintelligent discipline of life. In Christianity the doctrine of the path has all the warmth of a personal Redeemer who said 'I am the Way'; in Buddhism it is the Noble Eightfold Way.

The first step in the Eightfold Path is right understanding. A man cannot set out on a journey without knowing where he wants to go. Much has been said in this book about the error of substituting theoretical argument for spiritual effort, but theoretical understanding is in most cases necessary as a preliminary to spiritual effort, just as a scientist must know his theory before he starts work on his experiment. This is its value and its only value. In whatever religion a man may be striving, this means understanding its

¹ *ibid.*, xv.

orthodox doctrine. In Buddhism it means recognizing the Four Noble Truths, the law of karma (which is simply destiny based on cause and effect) and the impermanence and indeed unreality of the ego.

The next step is right aspiration, because to understand the way in theory and not to aspire to follow it in practice is of no avail.

These two steps give the necessary mental preparation and attitude of mind. They are followed by three concerning outer conduct, that is right speech, right action and right living, because a man's inner state is both reflected in and affected by his mode of life. To control speech and behaviour and maintain ethical standards is a mere preliminary to spiritual effort, but a necessary preliminary.

The next step is right effort. After understanding the path and aspiring to follow it, a man has to learn to control his speech, behaviour and manner of living, and only then is he ready to start actual effort on the path. Right effort has in general been defined as the fourfold effort to prevent the rise of evil thoughts and eliminate those that have already arisen, and to cultivate good thoughts and conserve those that have already arisen. In practice it may include any technique of spiritual effort prescribed by the guru.

The seventh step is right mindfulness. This is a constant vigilance, a constant awareness of oneself and one's behaviour. It has been compared to the vigilance of a door-keeper noticing every one who goes into the house or comes out. This also has been divided into four forms: mindfulness of one's physical being, of one's sensations, of one's state of mind, and of outer things.

Mindfulness of one's physical being can begin, it is said, simply with focusing attention on one's breathing. It is not necessary to lengthen the breathing or to conform to any pattern but simply to notice it. If persevered in this brings a state of serenity and helps in self-control. Also, all the familiar actions of the body should be performed con-

sciously, with the mind upon them; walking, sitting, eating, dressing—all the daily actions that one has hitherto performed dully, from habit. The actions themselves benefit, as a man acquires a new grace and control, but the state of mind benefits even more, and this is of value in meditation.

Constant mindfulness of the pleasant and unpleasant sensations that sweep over one's mind, the waves of desire and anger, hope and fear, reduces their force and gradually enables one to master them and maintain equilibrium. Just as one says that a person 'forgets himself' when he is swept away by anger, so by right mindfulness he remembers and thereby controls himself.

Mindfulness of states of mind is very similar. One learns to see emotions rising and to observe them objectively so that they lose their force and are unable to sweep one away, until finally one can dominate them. As a man acquires control over his emotions, he acquires also steadiness of mind in meditation.

Right mindfulness of things means regarding the universe and all beings, in accordance with Buddhist teaching, as a manifestation of energy having no reality of their own. As the *Theologia Germanica* puts it in the passage quoted above: 'Likewise he should count all creatures for nothing.' Thus a man is enabled to combat the attraction of some things and the repulsion of others by remembering their intrinsic unreality and is thereby established in calm of mind, unassailed by desire and fear.

The last step is right *samadhi*, a word which can perhaps be translated as non-mental meditation or spiritual awareness, sometimes in the form of ecstatic trance and sometimes (as was explained in the previous chapter in speaking of *sahaja samadhi*) compatible with full outer awareness. It is not a psychic state. A psychic trance or vision is an experience for which some people have aptitude and others have not, just as some have an ear for music and others have not, and does not imply any greater purity, any less egoism or any more

spirituality than in the person who lacks it. Right *samadhi*, on the other hand, is the natural state of the purified and spiritually developed man and leads up to the final Enlightenment.

The Christian path is the way of self-naughting and the imitation of Christ. In its early stages it may be intense concentration on the sufferings of Christ, leading sometimes to stigmata in the body of the worshipper. This type of meditation has its parallel in certain schools of Buddhism, especially in Tibet, but both Christian and Buddhist masters teach that formal meditation is a stage that must be transcended. 'It is necessary to explain when the spiritual man should abstain from the meditation which rests on imaginary forms and mental representations, in order that he may abstain from it neither sooner nor later than when the Spirit calls him. For as it is necessary to abstain from it at the proper time, in order to draw near unto God, that we may not be hindered by it, so also must we not cease from it before the time, lest we go backwards: for though all that the powers of the soul may apprehend cannot be proximate means of union for those who had made some spiritual progress, still they serve, as remote means, to dispose and habituate the minds of the beginners to that which is spiritual by means of the senses.'¹ In fact, the same plunging into awareness beyond all thought, vision and imagination is taught as in any Eastern religion. 'And therefore the sharp stirring of thine understanding, that will always press upon thee when thou settest thee to this blind work, must always be borne down; and unless thou bear him down, he will bear thee down. In so much that thou weenest best to abide in this darkness, and that nought is in thy mind but only God, if thou look wisely thou shalt find thy mind not occupied in this darkness, but in a clear beholding of something beneath God. And if it thus be, surely is that thing then above thee for the time,

¹ *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Book II, by St. John of the Cross.

and betwixt thee and thy God. And therefore purpose thee to put down such clear beholdings, be they never so holy nor so liking.¹ Just as Bodhidharma said to the Emperor, so a Christian saint also can say that Divine Knowledge is ignorance of the mind: 'But there is still more perfect Knowledge of God which is the result of a sublime ignorance and which is brought about by virtue of an incomprehensible union.'²

Both religions agree that the only escape from sin or suffering, whichever it may be called, and the only gateway to Beatitude is the utter surrender of everything. How this is to be brought about is a technical matter, the essential is the will to renounce. As Buddha said in the passage quoted on page 55: 'I maintain that the absolute attainment of our end is only to be found in the abandonment of everything.' A Christian mystic says and explains the same thing. "This hath Christ Himself declared, for He saith: "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. He that taketh not his cross, and followeth after Me, is not worthy of Me." And if he "hate not his father and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple." He meaneth it thus: "He who doth not forsake and part with everything, can never know My eternal truth, nor attain unto My life." And though this had never been declared unto us, yet the truth herself sayeth it, for it is so of a truth. But so long as a man clingeth unto the elements and fragments of this world (and above all to himself), and holdeth converse with them, and maketh great account of them, he is deceived and blinded, and perceiveth what is good no further than as it is most convenient and pleasant to himself and profitable to his own ends."³ This means in effect the renunciation of all desires and attachments, since, if a man is

¹ *The Cloud of Unknowing*, ix. Burns Oates and Washbourne, Ltd.

² Dionysius, *Divine Names*, vii.

³ *Theologia Germanica*, xix. Golden Treasury Edition.

not attached to a thing it makes no difference whether he uses it or not, whereas, on the other hand, if he is attached to it he is as much bound by it whether he possesses it or not. This is illustrated in a delightful story told by Christmas Humphreys in *Zen Buddhism*. Two Zen monks who were walking together came to a stream swollen by the rains. A young woman was standing on the bank, afraid to cross. One of them picked her up, carried her across and put her down on the farther bank. The other complained at his touching a woman and went on grumbling about it. A mile passed, two miles, and he was still complaining, when the first monk said: 'What, are you still carrying that girl? I put her down on the bank of the stream.' And since the ego is made up of attachments, renouncing all attachments means laying down one's life, as Christ bade.

Let us now consider the points on which there seems to be contradiction. The first and most obvious of these is belief in God. It has been commonly held that, whereas Christianity believes in a Personal God, the Eastern religions believe in an Impersonal Absolute; however, in the chapter on Hinduism it was shown that the Hindus distinguish between the Absolute and the Personal God, without however suggesting that there are two. In the ages of greater spirituality, prior to the spiritual decline which set in at the Renaissance, the same distinction was observed in Christianity also, the term 'Godhead' being used for the Impersonal Absolute. 'To God, as Godhead, appertain neither will, nor knowledge, nor manifestation, nor anything that we can name, or say, or conceive. But to God as God, it belongeth to express Himself, and know and love Himself, and to reveal Himself to Himself.'¹ However, it may be objected that this can establish agreement only with Hinduism, not Buddhism, since Buddhism does not teach belief in God at all. So long as one has the sentimental, anthropomorphic conception of God that is so common in modern

¹ *Theologia Germanica*, xxxi. Golden Treasury Edition.

times, the gulf seems impassable, but perhaps less so if one tries to conceive of God as That which always is, without beginning and without end, changeless from eternity to eternity, within Whom the entire universe is as nothing, and indeed is nothing, since it does not encroach upon His Infinity or change His Immutability, to Whom the mind cannot attain and yet Who attains to the mind, who is within every man, nearer to him than his own thoughts, knowing him so that the very hairs of his head are numbered, surrounding him so that whichever way he turns there is the Face of God. It is to be noted that when the author of the *Theologia Germanica* poses the question: 'What is there, then, which is, and which we may count for somewhat?' in the passage quoted on page 107, the answer he gives is not simply 'God', but 'that which we may call God'. When a Christian mystic says: 'for this way consists in a going out, beyond all things, into the Emptiness,'¹ he might be speaking the language of Buddhism, using the term 'Emptiness' for 'Nirvana'. If any critic should say that even this does not bridge the gulf, I know what answer Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi sometimes gave in such cases and I can think of none better: 'Try this first, and when you have attained this see whether you still have any doubts.' It is the mystic who knows what he describes and therefore whose word can be taken, and the more perfect the mystic the more firmly he abides on a level above the divergences and contradictions. There is nothing contrary to Buddhist teaching in the following account from the *Dialogues* of Jacob Boehme, the sixteenth-century Silesian mystic. 'Lastly, whereas I said, Whosoever finds it finds Nothing and all Things; that is also certain and true. But how finds he Nothing? Why, I will tell thee how He that findeth it findeth a supernatural, supersensual Abyss, which hath no ground or Byss to stand on, and where there is no place to dwell in; and he findeth also nothing is like unto it and therefore it may

¹ Ruysbroeck, *The Dark Light*, Book II, lxv.

fitly be compared to Nothing, for it is deeper than any Thing, and it is as Nothing with respect to All Things, forasmuch as it is not comprehensible by any of them. And because it is Nothing respectively, it is therefore free from All Things, and is that only Good, which a man cannot express or utter what it is, there being Nothing to which it may be compared, to express it by.

'But in that I lastly said: Whosoever finds it finds All Things; there is nothing can be more true than this assertion. It hath been the Beginning of All Things and it ruleth All Things. It is also the End of All Things; and will thence comprehend All Things within its circle. All Things are from it, and in it, and by it. If thou findest it thou comest into that ground from whence All Things are proceeded, and wherein they subsist; and thou art in it a King over all the works of God.'

One of the dominating authorities of Mediaeval Christendom, an authority whose influence permeates even the *Summa Theologiae* of St. Thomas Aquinas, the great theologian, was the early mystic who went by the name of Dionysius. In his attempt at definition he uses the same technique as Buddha in the passage on page 84 of mentioning two opposites in order to reject them both as inapplicable: in the one case, 'It is not fixed, it moves not on,' and in the other, 'neither is He standing nor moving nor at rest.' The following passage will show how little there is in common with the sentimentalized, anthropomorphic conceptions that are current today and how little divergent from Buddhism. And yet, even in saying this, it is necessary to insist that these anthropomorphic conceptions in the worship of the Personal God have truth and potency. No worshipper should be deprived of them. Only those who are drawn to do so should also not be forbidden to apprehend the Mystery beyond. It is of This that Dionysius speaks. 'Again, ascending yet higher, we maintain, that He is neither Soul nor Intellect; nor has He imagination, opinion, reason or understanding; nor

can He be expressed or conceived, since He is neither number, nor order; nor greatness, nor smallness; nor equality, nor inequality; nor similarity, nor dissimilarity; neither is He standing, nor moving, nor at rest; neither has He power, nor is power, nor is light; neither does He live, nor is He life; neither is He essence, nor eternity, nor time; nor is He subject to intelligible contact; nor is He science, nor truth, nor kingship, nor wisdom; neither one nor oneness; nor god-head nor goodness; nor is He Spirit according to our understanding, nor Filiation, nor Paternity; nor anything else known to us or to any other beings, of the things that are or of the things that are not; neither does anything that is know Him as He is; nor does He know existing things according to existing knowledge; neither can the reason attain to Him, nor name him, nor know him; neither is He darkness nor light, nor the false, nor the true; nor can any affirmation or negation be applied to Him, for although we may affirm or deny the things below Him, we can neither affirm nor deny Him, inasmuch as the all-perfect and unique Cause of all things transcends all affirmation, and the simple pre-eminence of His absolute nature is outside of every negation—free from every limitation and beyond them all.¹

To the modern Christian, it will also seem that there is a clear difference in the nature of the beatific state to be attained, since Christian doctrine speaks of perpetuation in a heavenly state, while Hindu and Buddhist doctrine speaks of Nirvana for those who attain and rebirth for those who do not. In discussing this, it is to be borne in mind that such discussions have no spiritual value; the important thing is to strive on the path and not to draw pictures of the rewards to be attained at the end of it, and neither Christ nor Buddha regaled his followers with any detailed picture of a posthumous state. It may be that the change that comes about in the nature of the aspirant is itself the reward. However, the question has to be considered.

¹ *The Mystical Theology*, v.

In the first place, there is no complete contradiction, since Buddhism and Hinduism also, as shown in the previous chapter, have a doctrine of heaven and hell. Hindu teaching, as expressed by Shankaracharya in his commentary on the Bhagavad Gita, is that one who is still bound by form passes on after death to a state of heaven or hell, corresponding to the good or evil balance sheet that he has prepared for himself during his life on earth, not by any arbitrary judgement but by rigorous law of cause and effect, his own mind externalizing for him the beatific or terrifying experiences which, the modern psychologist would say, have been created and stored up in his subconscious; and that when this harvesting of his karma or subconscious has been accomplished he is drawn back to earth again by his own cravings and attachments, and therefore according to the nature of these, that is to the same level to which he had risen or sunk in his previous life. This process continues life after life until there are no more cravings to draw him back, when he is merged in the Supreme Bliss that is his true state; that is to say that it continues until there is no further cause to produce further effect.

The Buddhist doctrine of heaven and hell, as shown in the previous chapter, concerns only those who have not understood the doctrine of Nirvana or striven for self-naughting but have accepted the world of duality as real. The Christian doctrine of heaven and hell, as shown in this chapter, does not concern those who follow a path of self-naughting in the quest of Divine Union. Both possibilities, therefore, exist in both religions. The main difference is that in an advaitic religion the path of duality seems abnormal, whereas in a dualistic religion the path of Unity does.

In order, however, to meet possible objections, it seems necessary to consider the purely exoteric Christian doctrine which regards heaven and hell as states or places in which the soul or individual being continues to exist eternally as a separate being apart from God; for in the present state of

Christianity it is possible that this is the most widely held view. Regarded first of all from a human point of view, before we come to its philosophical implications, such an attitude is appalling: that the good or evil wrought in this brief episode of human life should be repaid with bliss or torment unalterable through all eternity, torment that is not even educative, since there is no room for atonement, no hope of pardon, but only purposeless, unending pain. In *Pilgrim's Progress* Bunyan describes how, in the house of the Interpreter, he beheld a man condemned thus to eternal punishment. "I tempted the devil and he has come to me; I provoked God to anger and he has left me; I have so hardened my heart, that I cannot repent." When asked if there was no hope for him because "the son of the Blessed is very pitiful" he replied that there was none, saying "God hath denied me repentance. His word gives me no encouragement to believe; yea himself hath shut me up in this iron cage, nor can all the men in the world let me out. O eternity, eternity! how shall I grapple with the misery that I must meet in eternity!"¹ Commenting on this, Dr. Harding, a psychologist of the school of Jung, dismisses it as an intrusion of the Puritanical conscious mind of Bunyan upon a narrative which, as a whole, is a true reflection of intuitively perceived doctrine.¹ Actually, it is no invention of Puritanism but an echo of the mediaeval legend of Faust who was condemned because he had lost the power to repent. It may have significance in the narrative, representing the Faustian sin of combined arrogance and despair which certainly had its grip on the pilgrim, Christian, but taken in itself it shows clearly enough how revolting is the doctrine of eternal hell. Compare it with the scientific logic of cause and effect and the compassion of constantly renewed hope of redemption in the Hindu and Buddhist teaching referred to above. To some extent it is mitigated by the doctrine of purgatory, a state of purification by

¹ *Journey into Self*, p. 123, by M. Esther Harding. Vision Press.

suffering which leads eventually to heaven, but this doctrine is far from universal among Christians, being in fact almost confined to the Roman Catholic Church; and in any case it does not answer the objection, since only those destined for heaven are said to pass through purgatory and not those destined for hell. It is true that the above is only a human and emotional way of regarding the doctrine; nevertheless it has value, for what is true is also comely and strikes the healthy mind as just and appropriate.

Regarding this dogma from a philosophical point of view, it is necessary to ask first what is meant by eternal heaven and hell. In its full and true meaning 'eternal' signifies changelessly existing without beginning or end. It is in this sense that St. Augustine uses the word when he poses the question what it is that existed before the beginning of time and yet is not eternal. The answer he gives is remarkably similar to the Hindu conception of Prakriti or Maya as the Universal Substance, but what concerns us here is not the answer but his true use of the word 'eternal' in his statement that only God can be called eternal. It is recognized in Christianity as in every other religion that in the beginning there was God alone; therefore it is not in the full and true sense of the word that heaven and hell can be called eternal, since they had a beginning.

It is possible that simple believers may take the word to mean 'lasting for endless time', but that is too crude a conception to be official doctrine, since it would seek to contain God and eternity within time, whereas Christianity agrees with all other religions in holding that, as St. Thomas Aquinas puts it, *intellectus supra tempus*, intellect is above time. Time is merely a condition of this physical world. Even during this life, those who attain to a state of ecstasy or mystic vision have a sense of timelessness. Moreover, it is a common experience that in a dream a long chain of pleasant or frightening events may seem to occur in what is only a moment of physical time. For the same reason,

reverting to the Hindu teaching that heaven or hell is followed by a new incarnation with a new opportunity to build up a more favourable balance sheet, it is futile to ask how much time elapses between one incarnation and the next.

Between these two impossible interpretations of eternal heaven and hell a third might be suggested; it might be held to imply a heaven and hell which have a beginning but no end, which, so to speak, are eternal with regard to the future but not the past. However, this also is impossible, for it is the common teaching of religion and the common observation of man that whatever is born dies, what is created perishes, whatever has a beginning must have an end; only the Uncreated is Imperishable. Moreover, this interpretation also would seek to contain God within time or change, subjecting God to conditions of past and future, whereas all is contained within God's changeless eternity, the Eternal Now. 'The now-moment in which God made the first man, and the now-moment in which the last man will disappear, and the now-moment in which I am speaking are all one in God in whom there is only one now.'¹

Heaven and hell might be conceived of as eternal in the sense of lasting *ad saecula saeculorum*, to the end of some cycle of manifestation, but that is not a true meaning of the word and should be used, if at all, with explanation.

Actually, the plenitude of Christian doctrine envisages not only heaven and hell but a hierarchy of heavens and hells, just as does Hindu and Buddhist doctrine, as was indicated, for instance, by Dante in his Divine Comedy. The various heavens are states of being which can be achieved either posthumously or in this life; that is to say that they are equivalent to the stages of realization which could be franchised on the initiatic path of Hermetism and other indirect spiritual paths of Mediaeval Christendom. That this conception goes right back to the origin of the doctrine can be seen from St. Paul's casual reference to a man who

¹ *Meister Eckhart*, trans. by Raymond B. Blakney, p. 209.

had attained to the third heaven, with the further statement that he did not know whether the man was still living on earth or not.¹

Heaven can truly be eternal only when a man passes beyond the formal heavens to Divine Union and is utterly stripped of ego in the Great Emptiness. It is this that those who know have said in Christianity as in Buddhism or any other religion. 'And this love so maketh a man one with God that he can nevermore be separated from him.'² As Meister Eckhart says: 'Thou shalt lose thy thy-ness and dissolve in his his-ness; thy thine shall be his mine, so utterly one mine that thou in him shalt know eternalwise his is-ness, free from becoming: his nameless nothingness.'³ What Eckhart and Boehme call 'nothingness' and Ruysbroeck 'emptiness' is no other than Nirvana. I have already quoted Ruysbroeck's beautiful definition of 'going out, beyond all things, into the Emptiness'; in the passage leading up to it he speaks of Divine Union and attempts more than most of those who know, whether Buddhist or Christian, to describe the indescribable. 'At times, the inward man performs his introspection simply, according to the fruitive tendency, above all activity and above all virtues, through a simple inward gazing in the fruition of love. And here he meets God without intermediary. And from out the Divine Unity there shines into him a simple light; and this light shows him Darkness and Nakedness and Nothingness. In the Darkness, he is enwrapped and falls into somewhat which is in no wise, even as one who has lost his way. In the Nakedness, he loses the perception and discernment of all things, and is transfigured and penetrated by a simple light. In the Nothingness, all his activity fails him; for he is vanquished by the working of God's abysmal love, and in the fruitive inclination of his spirit he vanquishes God, and

¹ 2 Corinthians xii. 2.

² *Theologia Germanica*, xli.

³ *Meister Eckhart*, trans. by C. de B. Evans, p. 246.

becomes one spirit with him. And in this oneness with the spirit of God, he enters into a fruitive tasting and possesses the being of God.¹

Moreover, those who know, in Christianity as in other religions, attach no importance to death, realizing that it is possible to obey Christ's command 'Be ye perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect' already in this life, and so to attain to Divine Union. The author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* hints at this, although very cautiously and hedging his statement round so as to avoid giving offence to the theologians. 'Above thyself thou art: because thou attainest to come thither by grace, whither thou mayest not come by nature. That is to say, to be oned to God, in spirit and in love and in accordance of will. Beneath thy God thou art: for although it may be said in a manner that in this time God and thou be not two but one in spirit—in-so-much that thou or another that feeleth the perfection of this work may, by reason of that onehead, truly be called a god, as Scripture witnesseth²—and nevertheless thou art beneath him. For he is God by nature without beginning; and thou sometime wert nought in substance; and afterwards, when thou wert by his might and love made aught, thou wilfully with sin madest thyself worse than nought. And only by his mercy without thy desert art thou made a god in grace, oned with him in spirit without separation, both here and in the bliss of heaven without any end. So that, although thou be all one with him in grace, yet thou art full far beneath him in nature.'³

The careful provision 'although thou be all one with him in grace, yet thou art full far beneath him in nature' affirms the dual nature of the Liberated. On the one hand (in grace) Christ could say 'I and my Father are One', whereas on the other (in nature) he could say 'not my will be done

¹ Ruysbroeck, *The Dark Light*, Book II, lxv.

² St. John x. 34, quoting Psalm lxxxii. 6.

³ *The Cloud of Unknowing*, lxvii. Burns Oates and Washbourne, Ltd.

but thine.' The utter surrender and dissolution of all self-will is recognized, as it is in Hinduism and Buddhism (and in fact, in all religions) as the essential and sole precondition for attaining Identity or Nirvana, so that there remains no 'my will' to be done; but 'in nature', as the author of the *Cloud* puts it, there remains the appearance of a self with an apparent will which exists only to be surrendered. It is like the dual nature of the actor and the part he is acting. But speculation about it has never been encouraged; the thing to do is to try to get there.

This is the great quest. Hindu doctrine represents it, as shown earlier in this book, as an attempt to attain one's *swarupa*, that is one's true state or nature, simply to become one's Self. Nothing new is to be attained. There is nothing new. Even the expression 'to become one's Self' is really false, since it suggests that one was at any time other than one's self. It is simply to realize what one always was. At the end of the Christian Middle Ages, when a number of great mystics were putting the supreme teaching in words in one way or another for the spiritually dark age that was to follow, a story was composed of an errant knight who underwent many illusory (but none the less dangerous) adventures until finally his madness left him and he realized his true identity—not that he was no longer Don Quixote but that he had never been Don Quixote. Can one suppose that this perfect allegory was written with understanding? It would be no more remarkable than to suggest that it came about by accident.

The basic reason why the doctrine of eternal heaven in any other meaning than Divine Union or 'going out into the Emptiness' and eternal hell in any meaning at all is a limitation of true understanding in whatever religion it may be taught (and it has its adherents in Islam also) is that it denies the supreme truth of Advaita, of the Infinity and Immutability of God and the resultant unreality of any other-than-God. That is why Hindu and Buddhist teachers

insist that Nirvana is not attained but already exists, that it is the eternally existent Reality which is now; only the veils of ignorance hiding it from sight have to be removed. Even though heaven and hell were to endure as long as the individual beings who could be in a state of heaven or hell endured, to suppose them co-eternal with God would be to deny the Infinity and Unicity of God. Human beings, together with the worlds or conditions in which they exist, correspond to a certain level of reality but in ultimate truth there is God Alone. The spiritual decline which has gathered momentum in the West from the Renaissance onwards has led to an anthropomorphic conception of God as a Person about whose existence or non-existence it is possible to argue and, by losing the essential spirit of Christianity, has made it hard to understand the essence of other religions either.

And this brings us to another apparent contradiction: that is the widespread Christian belief that Christianity cannot agree with other religions because it alone is true, being divinely revealed. If one regards this claim also from a human point of view before proceeding to examine it philosophically, one sees that such an attitude is natural to all three of the proselytizing religions, and indeed, might even be said to be necessary in order to give them the requisite missionary fervour to spread abroad. It does, indeed, exist in all three, but it is in Christianity that it is the most rigid. The objection to it is that it is an attempt to tie the hands of God, asserting that only in one way and to one community can He give right guidance. What the Hindu cannot help noticing about it is that, although the adherents of all three proselytizing religions tend to hold such a view, each person is convinced that the religion in which he himself happens to have been brought up is the true one. Unfortunately rationalists and materialists notice this also and use it as a weapon of derision against religion in general. Gladly accepting missionary misrepresentations of tolerant

religions such as Hinduism, they feel no obligations to investigate them seriously, while they represent the proselytizing religions as self-condemned by their mutual condemnation.

Such a claim to a monopoly of truth might have seemed plausible at a time when the world was divided into a number of civilizations which knew very little about each other. The great mystics, for instance, were not called upon to consider any other way but their own. However, to suggest today, with the present accessibility of information about the various religions, and indeed the difficulty of remaining ignorant about them, that all civilizations prior to two thousand years ago and outside the Mediterranean area were founded upon a morass, that all peoples outside Western Europe and the Near East have been denied true guidance, that the Taoist Sages, the Hindu Rishis, the Buddhist Arahats and Sufi Saints were wandering benighted without guidance, and that the glories of their teachings, some fragments of which have been quoted in this book, are false, smacks not only of ignorance but arrogance, and such an attitude can only alienate the more intelligent of those to whom it is presented.

It is true that the Catholic Church qualifies its monopolistic claim with a distinction which it draws between 'revealed religion' and 'natural religion', the implication being that truth was revealed to mankind through Christ alone but that, by the mercy of God, even benighted Hindus and Chinese who have never heard of Christ may feel the religious urge in their hearts and be drawn to God through some approximation to spiritual knowledge, although without the true teaching. There is an unpleasant arrogance about the attitude, a wholly unjustified claim to superiority, in order to defend which its partisans are driven to a constant sniping at other religions, studying them in order to belittle them; for the claim depends on the monstrous assumption that no non-Christian has ever attained or ever

can attain to the Source of Revelation and speak with authority.

And this brings us to the doctrinal basis of the Christian claim to a monopoly of true guidance. It is based on Christ's statement that he is the Way, the Truth and the Life and that none can come to the Father except through the Son. All this is true and no Hindu teacher need deny it. What is false is the identification of a spiritual truth with a historical fact, thereby tying the hands of God. The Word is One and Unique, but its physical manifestation need not be. The exclusivity which belongs to the Divine Word has been falsely attributed to a historical episode in which the Word was made manifest. If many successive actors can act one part in a play or if one man can be reflected in many mirrors, what is to prevent the One God from assuming many forms, each form being not a part of God but God Himself manifested and therefore the totality of the Word, the only Son of the Father? And yet few Christians have perceived this possibility, intimated with brilliant intuition by Simone Weil in the passage already quoted on page 61 about 'a single and same Personage who is the only Son of God' concealed under many mythological names. In Hinduism Sri Krishna expressly guarded against such an error of jealous localization when he said in the Bhagavad Gita: 'Even those who worship other gods with full faith really worship Me' (ix. 23). A modern commentator on the Gita has said: 'Let us not say, "Arjuna had Krishna. Where are we to find our Krishna?" Let us not get caught in the fallacy of historicity, that there was an individual called "Krishna". Krishna shines in the heart of each of us, the Inner Ruler. He is nearer to us than the nearest.'¹

Not only can the Word, while remaining One, descend on earth in many forms, but it can descend into the heart of every believer. This the Christian Church recognizes in its doctrine of 'the Christ in you'. Every faithful Christian is the

¹ *Talks on the Gita*, p. 10, by Vinoba Bhawe.

spouse of Christ, just as every Gopi was the bride of Krishna. In order to have full redemptive power for any Christian, the birth of Christ, the Light shining in darkness, must take place in the dark of his own heart and be followed in himself by the crucifixion of the ego and the resurrection of the self born again of the Spirit; yet, knowing this, Christians have allowed the universal spiritual doctrine of the Logos to become obscured behind the historical fact of an incarnation which occurred at a certain time and place in history.

This insistence on the uniqueness of the historical fact instead of the spiritual principle has secured for Christianity the illusion of a monopoly, but at a heavy price, for it involves denial of the possibility of any man's attaining the Supreme Identity, of being 'oned with God' as *The Cloud of Unknowing* puts it, of knowing eternalwise his isness, as Meister Eckhart says, of being *vergottet*, made divine, as says the *Theologia Germanica*, since by doing so he would become One with the Father, as Christ was. St. Athanasius said: 'He became man that we might be made God.'¹ and St. Augustine, making the same distinction that I have already commented on in *The Cloud of Unknowing*: 'He called men Gods as being deified by His Grace, not as born of His substance';² but modern (that is post-Renaissance) Christian writers strive to uphold the divinity of the Christ-state by denying the possibility of attaining it. Christ bade them 'Be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect', but they have bound themselves to deny the possibility of doing so.

While ruling out the highest possibility in their own religion, this attitude leads to a constant alertness to deny the Self-realization of the Sages in other religions, to deny even the possibility of their Self-realization, as though jealously guarding the uniqueness of Christ, when in fact such an attitude shows failure to understand this very uniqueness,

¹ *Oratio de Incarnatione Verbi*, Tome I, p. 108.

² In Psalm xlix.

which is not a uniqueness of number but of the Spirit. He was unique through being One with the Father; and the Father can manifest in countless forms without being other than himself, without being the less unique.

Before leaving the subject of the Christian claim to a monopoly of truth, reference should also be made to Christ's injunction to spread the Gospel through the whole world, for this also has been taken as a basis for the claim. This, however, as previously remarked, is a characteristic of all three proselytizing religions and therefore cannot imply the invalidity of the others. Moreover, the injunction itself may be misunderstood. It also says in the Gospels that Jews from the whole world gathered at Jerusalem at the time of the Passover, but that does not mean from India or China or even Persia; it means from the world of the Roman Empire. The Eastern countries were known but were not a part of the Roman world. As explained in the first chapter of this book, the early Christians who spread the Gospel through Greece and Rome and all the provinces of the Roman Empire understood 'the whole world' in this way. Why otherwise did they not press forward through Persia to India and China, as they did through Greece and Rome and on into the less civilized lands beyond? They would have met with greater understanding and less opposition. And why the angel that turned St. Paul back when he tried to take the message eastwards? Clearly that was not its destination. In any case, the pitiful situation at present is that heralds of a diminished spirituality are trying to thrust it upon those who still possess a greater. Let them concentrate on recovery of the plenitude of Christian doctrine and achievement, on the 'going out into the Emptiness' and then let them proclaim it to those who follow other paths if they still feel like doing so.

In its essence, a religion is divine, but insofar as it is an institution it is human, and every human institution carries within itself the seeds of its own decay. The weakness of

Christianity from the beginning was that the highest level of doctrine, that of Advaita, was not officially developed but remained a preserve for the esoterists. Even in the early centuries of the Church, when the spiritual level was higher than today, it was not generally recognized. This can be seen not only from the absence of direct, open reference to it but from the disputes that raged over the dual nature of Christ. Christendom was fiercely torn in its early centuries by the monophysite heresy which held that Christ's nature was purely divine, as against the orthodox doctrine upheld in the Nicene Creed that he was both human and divine. Theologically, the defenders of orthodoxy were right, for, as they clearly saw, the monophysite view would have undermined the doctrine of atonement and redemption. Since it would be blasphemy to attribute suffering to God, one could also not attribute it to a Christ who was wholly God, so that the crucifixion would lose its meaning and it would become impossible to say that Christ had taken on himself the sins of the world or suffered for men's redemption. Therefore it was necessary to postulate, as the Nicene Creed has it, that Christ was at the same time 'very God and very man'. Disputes on this theme raged through Christendom, and many there were who lost their life or liberty for taking the side which happened to be banned in the place where they were living. What concerns us here is that beneath the turgid theological arguments on either side there is scarcely a trace of any conception of the state of Self-realization which is what is implied, the state known in India as *Jivan-Mukti*, Realization while still living.

Among peoples where Self-realization is a recognized possibility, such disputes do not arise. In India in particular sufficient is said in the Upanishads and other writings about the possibility of the Divine State. In Buddhism also it is spoken of as Nirvana and one who has attained is termed an Arahant in Hinayana Buddhism and a Bodhisattva in Mahayana. Simple folk and theologians may fail to understand

what this implies, but no one kills or imprisons them for their ignorance. In our own times, when the Sage Ramana Maharshi was dying of his long and painful illness, some of his devotees argued among themselves whether he felt the pain or not. He would occasionally admit 'there is pain' but he would never say 'I have pain', and for the most part he seemed oblivious to it, though the doctors knew that it must be intense. Just as the senses could distinguish red from blue or salt from sweet, so they could register pain, but the pain was not his because he had ceased to identify himself with the body which endured it or the mind to which the nerves reported it. When devotees lamented the long illness, he said: 'What a pity that they confuse Bhagavan with this body and attribute suffering to him!' There was physical pain but, being One with the Self in eternal Bliss, he was not the body that suffered. Christians also should have understood this about Christ.

The limitations that have been referred to in exoteric Christianity all stem from the same root, the failure to recognize Advaita. The conception of an eternal heaven and hell is based on the assumption of individual beings eternally separate from God and therefore limits God's infinity as well as man's attainment. The claim to a historical unicity for Christ denies the possibility of man's being perfect as his Father in heaven is perfect as well as the possibility of God's manifesting Himself in many ways, and therefore this also sets limits to God as well as to man.

This is not an attempt to criticize Christ and his teaching, as so many Christians have presumed to criticize other religions and their teachers. And indeed, it is always the dualist who criticizes, as though resentful that any others should go farther than himself; the Advaitin sees that there is room for both outlooks and no antagonism between them. 'And right as Martha complained then on Mary her sister, right so yet unto this day all actives complain of contemplatives. . . . And so me thinketh that these worldly

living men and women should also full well be held excused of their complaining words touched before, although they say rudely what they say: having regard to their ignorance. Because right as Martha knew full little what Mary her sister did when she complained of her to our Lord; right so in the same manner these folk nowadays know full little, or else nought, what these young disciples of God mean when they set them from the business of this world and draw them to be God's special servants in holiness and rightfulness of spirit. And if they knew truly I dare say that they would neither do nor say as they say.¹ 'The dualists, firmly clinging to their conclusions, contradict one another. The non-dualists find no conflict with them. Since Non-duality is Ultimate Reality, duality is said to be its effect. The dualist sees duality in both. Therefore the non-dualist position does not conflict with the dualist position.'²

The absence of openly expressed advaitic teaching is not a great privation except perhaps to persons of a particular temperament, since the devotional path can lead to the Mystic Union whence Divine Grace, requiring no form or doctrine, will carry the soul on to the ultimate Unknowing, the supreme Emptiness, the unalterable Oneness. It is only ignorance or denial of the possibility of Advaita that is a privation, and this need not have occurred.

Some incompleteness is inevitable both in Christianity and Buddhism, since each presents the possibility which the other withholds; and as the esoteric side is insufficiently developed in the former, so is the exoteric in the latter. It may not be too fanciful to suppose that they are to be completed and fused through the action of the Tenth Avatar, the Rider on the White Horse, whom Christians await as the Second Coming of Christ and Buddhists as the Maitreya Buddha. In their present form it is not necessary to say that either is the more complete, though it may be said that Buddhism

¹ *The Cloud of Unknowing*, xviii-xix. Burns Oates and Washbourne, Ltd.

² *Gandapada's Karika to the Mandukya Upanishad*, III, 17, 18.

goes farther in its exposition of doctrine, since Advaita is the ultimate truth beyond the truth of duality. Therefore, at the end of his life, before leaving his disciples, the Buddha said: 'I have taught the truth without making any distinction between esoteric and exoteric, for in teaching the doctrine the Tathagata does not keep a closed fist like the sort of teacher who holds some things back.' Christ, however, after teaching what was outwardly the religion of duality, said to his followers before his crucifixion: 'There are many more things that I have to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.' It is tempting to say that their error has been in supposing that there was nothing more to say, and in a certain sense this is true, since the doctrine and path of Advaita was not clearly and formally laid before them, and yet there had been indications enough of it for those who could understand and were willing to give up everything and be born again of the Spirit in order to be perfect as their Father in heaven is perfect.

Epilogue

Does this book serve any useful purpose? I believe it does. Indeed, I should not write it if I did not, for I am not one of those who hold that any subject is good enough for a book if it can find the necessary quota of readers. The need for such a study has not always existed, and in fact arose quite recently, one might even say during the present century. It is a sign of our times.

Throughout the Middle Ages the world was divided into a number of separate civilizations, each on a religious basis and having very little connection with or knowledge of one another. The West was not 'Europe' but 'Christendom' and the only other civilization with which it had much contact was Islam, and that mainly through war. There was, it is true, a good deal more cultural contact than commonly supposed, but no real attempt of the two civilizations to understand one another, and no need for it, since each was culturally self-sufficient, with its own way of life. The very existence of Buddhism was scarcely known in the West. An Islamicized form of the life of Buddha was written under the name of 'Budisat' (from Bodhisattva) and got corrupted by a change in the diacritical points which distinguish an Arabic *b* from a *y* to 'Yudisat'. This was taken over by both Jewish and Christian writers, each claiming the saint as their own, and finally reached Western Christendom as *The Life of the Blessed Josaphat*, still keeping an Indian background but heavily Christianized. Similarly in the Buddhist world Christianity was practically unknown. The only civilizations which served as a meeting ground

for the religions were those of India and China, and there no introduction was necessary, since tolerance reigned anyway, based on the understanding that many paths lead to the same goal.

Under such circumstances, there was no harm in representing the truth and validity of the dominant form of Christianity as something unique, since the only alternative to it that Christians were likely to come in contact with was some form of heresy or other. The need for explaining other religions did not arise.

At the time of the Renaissance, Western civilization abandoned its religious foundation and was rebuilt on the basis of humanism and physical science. From being theocentric it became anthropocentric. It is true that at the same time there was a tremendous outburst of religious fervour leading to the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, to wars between Catholic and Protestant and persecution of each by the other, but this type of fervour, not based on the hidden wealth of spiritual realization of the mystic, could not long endure, and by the eighteenth century it was already yielding place to rationalism and materialism. Although jerkily, held up from time to time by dykes and then overwhelming them, the modern trend which arose at the Renaissance has swept forward like a tide, finding its fulfilment in a secular and mechanized world where material and utilitarian values dominate, while a spiritual basis for life remains only as the secret treasure of those who refuse to go with the stream.

European expansion through the East also began at the Renaissance and became ever more insistent throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but it did not at first involve much cultural contact. The Portuguese aim was simply to exploit and convert the heathen, whether by force or persuasion did not matter. St. Francis Xavier may have displayed great sanctity within the fold, but for the Brahmins and other Easterners he had nothing but abuse.

There was never any question of trying to understand their point of view. With the Protestants, that is the Dutch and British, the question of conversion did not at first arise. In fact missionaries were definitely not encouraged. But that did not betoken any desire for understanding. It stemmed rather from a crass materialism which sought to trade and exploit free from the moral code which cramped a man's style at home. Much later, after Protestant missionaries had also entered the field, this attitude is still echoed in Kipling's doggerel:

Ship me somewhere East of Suez,
Where the best is like the worst,
Where there aren't no ten commandments,
And a man can raise a thirst.

Not an attitude likely to lead to international or inter-religious understanding.

Later, even when missionary activity did begin, it was only too often such as Gandhi complains of, and scarcely likely to awaken spiritual understanding. 'He [Gandhi's father] had, besides, Musulman and Parsi friends, who would talk to him about their own faiths, and he would listen to them always with respect, and often with interest. Being his nurse, I often had a chance to be present at these talks. These many things combined to inculcate in me a toleration for all faiths.

'Only Christianity was at the time an exception. I developed a sort of dislike for it. And for a reason. In those days Christian missionaries used to stand in a corner near the high school and hold forth, pouring abuse on Hindus and their gods. I could not endure this. I must have stood there to hear them once only, but that was enough to dissuade me from repeating the experiment. About the same time I heard of a well-known Hindu having been converted to Christianity. It was the talk of the town that,

when he was baptized, he had to eat beef and drink liquor, that he also had to change his clothes, and that henceforth he began to go about in European costume including a hat. These things got on my nerves. Surely, I thought, a religion that compelled one to eat beef, drink liquor, and change one's clothes did not deserve the name. I also heard that the new convert had already begun abusing the religion of his ancestors, their customs and their country. All these things created in me a dislike for Christianity.¹

One must visualize the vegetarian and teetotal atmosphere of an Indian country town to appreciate how objectionable such behaviour would be. True, it had nothing to do with real Christianity, but that is the whole objection.

In the nineteenth century the anti-spiritual, anthropocentric trend of the Renaissance finally attained completion and religion reached its lowest ebb in Europe. It was the time of Marx, Freud and Darwin, when agnosticism or atheism was taken for granted as the intelligent attitude for a scientist or philosopher, whatever romantic survivals of faith a Gladstone or a Tennyson might show—and even Tennyson found more to admire in 'honest doubt' than in the creeds. Superficially, religion doubtless seems to have sunk even lower today—there are more people who ignore it completely, churches are emptier, moral restraints are less and devout sentiments are more seldom expressed; but (and I shall return to that point shortly) that is only the delayed action of nineteenth-century intellectual agnosticism.

Paradoxically enough, the nineteenth century was an age of earnest missionary enterprise. The residual Christianity with its mystic fire all but spent was being hawked through the East even while it was being rejected at home. The impression made on the youthful Gandhi is enough to show how far it was from implying mutual understanding between the religions.

¹ *An Autobiography*, pp. 24-5, by M. K. Gandhi. Luzac and Co., Ltd.

At the same time, a study of Eastern religions began to be made by the newly established science, if such it can be called, of comparative religion. This also, however, was no step towards spiritual or cultural understanding. In an attitude of mind best typified, perhaps, by Sir J. G. Fraser's *Golden Bough*, it busied itself with all the oddities of religions but never with the simple question of truth. Itself typifying the rationalist revolt against religion, it set up the rational mind as judge of what is beyond it. Religions were treated as museum pieces and analysed for correspondences, borrowings, influences; everything was studied about them but their spirit, and all that was essential was ignored. This type of study made great play of being impartial but in fact it was not, for the very fact of studying a religion as an outgrowth of folklore and animism involves an initial assumption that its claims to spiritual enlightenment are false. According to his outlook, the particular student would include Christianity in the general *a priori* condemnation or exempt it as a special case, but either way this belittling of religion in general could certainly not lead to mutual understanding.

There were, of course, a few honourable exceptions who perceived that the West had stumbled blindfold into a treasure-house. There was Sir William Jones who proclaimed the efficiency of the Sanskrit language and the beauty and grandeur of its literature; there was Max Mueller with his study of Hinduism and Mr. and Mrs. Rhys Davids as interpreters of Buddhism. There were a number such, but their work roused small echoes at the time. In the early decades of this century, when the tide was already turning, there was the greatest and most influential of them all, René Guénon, who, with relentless logic and pitiless scorn, expounded the unanimity of the religions and the fallacies of modernism. His work falls in the new era and was largely instrumental in forming it.

Even less than half a century ago the popular conception

was still of an almost biological difference between Easterners and Westerners, the former being held dreamers unfit to govern themselves and the latter the natural lords of the universe. Once again Kipling hit the prevailing viewpoint with his much-quoted jingle:

For East is East and West is West
And never the twain shall meet.

Emerson, for instance, wrote a poem about the patient East bowing its head while Alexander's cohorts swept over. If he had troubled to read his history instead of retailing a glib attitude of mind, he would have found that, far from bowing their heads, the Indian city states and small kingdoms resisted Alexander the Great as fiercely as the Greek city states had formerly resisted Xerxes, and that, even though each one was overthrown, the opposition was so severe that on the borders of Magadha, the first large and really formidable adversary, Alexander's troops mutinied and refused to go farther.

Now the attitude of mind is changed. Indeed, it is startling to recall how recently it held the field and how completely it has been swept away. Such a speeding up of the process of change is itself a sign of the times. The various Eastern peoples, after long keeping Western materialism at bay, not only succumbed to it but rushed clamorously forward to acquire its armaments and industries in order to defend themselves from Western exploitation. In doing so, first Japan and then China and other Eastern countries showed that they can make guns and use them as well as Westerners. And in their new enthusiasm the Eastern nations are rapidly abandoning the spiritual bases of their life and culture, just as the West did when it adopted its materialist civilization, only much more rapidly with the general speeding up of history that is a sign of the times. On the other hand, more and more Westerners, grown sick of

materialism, feeling vaguely that there must be something beyond but not knowing where to find it, are turning to the still valid spiritual wisdom of the East.

The nadir of Western spirituality has already passed and a new and powerful reversal of trend has set in, a new swing away from materialism to spirituality, a craving for a spiritual basis to life, for some understanding of the meaning and purpose of life. It is true that this is still confined to a minority, or rather a number of separate and disconnected minorities all feeling their way by different routes to the same end; but that is the nature of new trends: it was the nature of the fifteenth-century Renaissance also. Spiritual and intellectual pioneers, revolting against the spirit of the age, set up a new trend and gradually, like a pyramid, it spreads out to ever wider levels. It is another sign of the present speeding up of events that this new trend should have set in at the apex while the base of the pyramid is still absorbing the materialist and atheist influences from nineteenth-century philosophers.

The signs of the new trend are many and varied, not all being healthy. There is the widespread interest in Eastern religions, the groups of Westerners studying Vedanta, Tao or Zen Buddhism, though not always with sufficient approximation to the spirit of the original. Meanwhile the world of scholarship has discovered the legacies of ancient and more spiritual civilizations, whereas only two generations ago civilization itself was still looked upon as an invention of the Greeks, the Egyptians from whom they learned so much being forgotten and the Chinese and Hindus ignored. In Christianity itself there is a renewed interest in the mystics and a new vigour animating the Churches. At the turn of the century they had almost succumbed to humanist influences but are now uncompromising in rejecting them. The prominence of books on religion on the publishers' lists is sign enough of the re-awakened interest among the reading public. The

discarding of naturalism in art and rationalism in philosophy is also an offshoot of the same trend. A less healthy sign is the psychic experimentation, the revival of occultism in many of its forms, and the proliferation of strange new sects and prophets. This also Christ foretold as a sign of the last days.

Outer events conspire to advance a mental or spiritual trend, and there is no doubt that the insecurity caused in many parts of the world by the last war and throughout the world by the fear of the next has been a powerful influence in turning men away from their materialist self-satisfaction. It is hard now to recapture the nineteenth-century smugness, so alien has it become. It occasions a bitter laugh to remember that the generation of Macaulay, and even of Kipling, considered themselves Nature's crowning glory, inherently superior alike to past ages and to the degenerate people of the South and the East. Progress was automatic and assured; ascendancy over the 'lesser breeds without the law' perpetual, the 'white man's burden' a rewarding weight to bear, and the wonders of science a proof of man's achievement and of his purely human perfectibility. And now, after so short a time, the descendants of those so satisfied have been thrown out of the East and brought to the brink of destruction. They have found that scientific advance adds nothing to man's wisdom but threatens him like a razor in the hands of a fool. Yet this new insecurity is not so much the cause of the change as the favourable climate in which it grows. Its seeds had been sown before.

One remarkable sign of the new era that is struggling to be born, or rather of the twilight period shrouding a death and a birth, is that the world has not only ceased to be divided into East and West but into any separate civilizations at all. One materialist civilization has spread out from the West and overswept the whole world, though in two rival forms. One of these is materialistic not only in fact, but in theory, denying the spiritual basis of life and exerting

itself to stamp out religious practice and smother religious faith; and this doctrinal materialism has already captured China, one of the two great metropolitan centres of spirituality in the East. The other branch of modernism is materialistic only in practice and tolerates spirituality. Within this branch the resurgent interest in religion is spreading and the new internationalism is opening up a knowledge of all the religions to the reading public in each one of them. Any Christian can obtain expositions of Buddhism and translations of its scriptures from the nearest bookshop or public library, and any Buddhist in a modernized town or within range of a missionary can learn about Christianity. It is in such circumstances that books such as the present have become necessary, setting forth the basic spiritual wisdom and unanimity of the religions for such as may be puzzled or confused by their superficial differences. Certain it is that any religion which claims a monopoly of truth and denounces others under the circumstances of today is playing into the hands of the enemy, whose thesis it is that since all religions claim incompatible monopolies of truth all alike must be false. It is also confusing thereby the most intelligent of its own followers, those who seek to understand what they profess, and may thus drive them in despair to revolt or denial. It can certainly no longer hope to retain their allegiance by means of ignorance, through an index of forbidden books. For that, political control and control of education would be necessary; and in fact, even with these weapons, the Communist states, which try the same technique, find it difficult. It may be that those who rebel against ignorance or misrepresentation will not be numerous, but in spiritual things numbers are not important. Those whom Christ called the salt of the earth were also not numerous, but if they lose their savour wherewith shall it be salted?

The establishment of a world-wide civilization in our age, although brought about by a materialist agency, may

have a spiritual significance, for people are made instruments to accomplish what has to be done, unknown to themselves. The Tenth Avatar is still to come and his function is not merely to restore religion, like that of previous Avatars, but to close this *manvantara* and open the doors on the next. For this purpose the appropriate setting can only be a world-wide civilization where the same fate can overtake the whole of mankind. In Christian terminology: if the second coming of Christ is to gather the elect together into the Heavenly Jerusalem and cast the remainder to destruction, it must be an event affecting the whole world. Throughout history, ancient, mediaeval and modern, this condition has not obtained. A catastrophe in Egypt would not have affected China nor what happened in America have interested Russia. Christianity was not concerned with the fate of Buddhism, nor Islam with either. It is surprising how recently it would have seemed impossible for any upheaval to have its repercussions from east to west and north to south and how naturally conditions have come about so that it should. Today, for the first time in known history, an event such as the coming of an Avatar would have to affect not one civilization only but the whole world.

Moreover, the present rush towards materialism in Eastern countries and incipient reaction against it in the West recalls Christ's picture of the corn and weeds growing together in the same field until harvest time: there are few parts of the world that could now be called completely materialistic or that still organize life on a spiritual basis; in nearly all the two attitudes exist side by side. Everywhere the materialistic civilization has been accepted but there are some who, for themselves, reject its implications.

Taking a narrow view, Christians might hold that the second coming of Christ was to sweep all mankind into their camp. Muslims similarly believe that it is to herald the final victory of Islam, the Christ and his Forerunner, the Mahdi,

both being due to appear on earth as Muslims. Buddhists have their traditions of the Maitreya Buddha and Hindus of the Avatar of the White Horse. Less known religions also, such as those of the American Indians, have their predictions of the final consummation. It seems wiser, therefore, not to insist on the necessity of any one form, lest one should be like those who did not recognize Christ when he came because they had expected a different appearance, but to be spiritually alert and to recognize the signs as they appear.

At the same time, this does not mean that one should or even can make an amalgam of the religions, as so many false prophets have sought to do in recent times, each one succeeding only in creating a new sect that flourished for a short while and then died down. Each religion is a spiritual whole with a discipline of life and paths of development, and what is helpful in the environment of one may well be illegitimate in another. Neither does it mean that one should run after every one who is proclaimed a Christ or an Avatar. Christ himself warned how many false claimants there would be. All that is required is to find a path and follow it but at the same time to recognize the validity of other paths and treat them with respect as leading to the same Goal. Even what has been said here about the suitability of world conditions for the advent of the Tenth Avatar could be harmful if it led to too great preoccupation with outer events. For each man the spiritual quest, which is the highest purpose of religion, is an inner event, and what happens outwardly concerns him only as the circumstance or medium of his quest. The present circumstance simply is that the religions, being now known to one another, should exist harmoniously side by side, with full mutual recognition.



Glossary

NOTE ON PRONUNCIATION

The vowels in the transliteration here used have rather the Continental than the English values. They are approximately as follows:

a as in father

e between *e* in ten and *ai* in wait

i between *i* in bid and *ee* in meet

o between *o* in hot and *or* in short

u between *u* in put and *oo* in shoot

ai as *igh* in night

ou as in pound

The consonants are pronounced as in English, with the following exceptions:

1. A consonant between *v* and *w* but approximating more to *v* is transliterated by some writers as *v* and by others as *w*, as for instance in the two forms *Isvara* and *Iswara*.

2. A consonant between *s* and *sh* but approximating more to *sh* is transliterated by some writers as *s* and by others as *sh*, as for instance in the two forms *Isvara* and *Ishvara*.

This consonant is used in both *Siva* and *Vishnu*, but it has become usual to transliterate it as *s* in the former case and *sh* in the latter, and therefore that usage is followed here.

3. The words *jnani* and *jnana* are pronounced approximately as *gnyani* and *gnyana*.

4. *h* after a letter other than *s* or *c* does not change the letter but is slightly aspirated.

Advaita: the doctrine of non-duality or monism.

amrita: the elixir of life.

anatta: the Buddhist dogma of the non-existence of the ego.

Arabat (or *Aravant*): A Buddhist term for a Self-realized man.

asura: evil spirit.

Atma: the Self or Spirit.

Avatar: a Divine Incarnation.

Bhagavan: the commonly used name for God. A title used for one who is recognized as having attained Identity with the Self.

bhakta: devotee; one who follows the path of devotion.

bhikkhu: Buddhist monk.

bhikkhuni: Buddhist nun.

Bodhisattva: a spiritual master of Mahayana Buddhism who is said to postpone his entrance into Nirvana in order to help suffering mankind.

Brahma Nirguna: God beyond all conception of Attributes, the Absolute, the Godhead of mediaeval Christian mystics.

Brahma Saguna: God with Divine Attributes, the Personal God.

Brahman: The Absolute, the same as Brahma Nirguna.

buddhi: Intellect, not in the sense of thought or mentality or reason but direct intuitional understanding.

darshan: a philosophical viewpoint. Also an audience or interview with a holy man.

deva: good spirit, god or angel.

dharma: religion, order or ritual, right and harmonious mode of living.

dvaita: duality.

ghat: burning ground.

gopis: cowherd girls who represent human souls or the faculties of a man as lovers of Kishna.

guna: stress, force, tendency or quality. The three gunas, sattva, rajas and tamas (which see) govern the whole process of creation.

imam: prayer leader in a Muslim congregation.

Ishvara: the Personal God, the same as Brahma Saguna.

jal: water.

Jivan Mukta: one who has attained Nirvana or Self-realization during the life on earth.

Jivan Mukti: Nirvana while still living on earth.

jivatma: the individuality or ego.

Kali: the wife or Shakti of Siva, the Goddess of Destruction of the ego.

kali yuga: the spiritually dark age equivalent to the iron age of Western classical antiquity.

kalpa: a great cycle of manifestation.

Lakshmi: the wife or Shakti of Vishnu, the Goddess of wealth and prosperity.

Mahadev: the Great God, a name of Siva.

manas: the reason or mentality.

manvantara: a lesser cycle of manifestation within the kalpa (which see).

Maya: Universal Illusion or veiling, the manifested universe. Also (though spelt differently) the name of the mother of Buddha.

Moksha: Self-realization, the same as Mukti or Nirvana.

Mt. Meru: the traditional sacred mountain at the centre of the universe.

Mukti: Self-realization, the same as Moksha or Nirvana.

Natarajan: Siva in the cosmic dance of creation and dissolution of the universe.

Nirvana: Enlightenment or Self-realization, the same as Moksha or Mukti.

Nirvikalpa samadhi: Self-realization, permanent, inalienable absorption in the Bliss of the Divine State, compatible with simultaneous exercise of the human faculties.

Pali: a North Indian dialect in which the Buddhist scriptures of the Hinayana school are kept, not spoken today and also not spoken by the Buddha.

pani: water.

Paramatma: the Supreme Spirit, the Self.

pial: a raised stone platform often found at the entrance to an Indian house.

Prakriti: Universal Substance.

Purusha: the Spirit.

rajas: the quality or guna of expansion outwards.

rana: a title used for some Indian kings or rulers.

Rudra: a name of Siva.

sadhu: one who has abandoned home and property in quest of Realization.

sahaja samadhi: temporary immersion in the Bliss of Being, ecstatic trance.

Saivite: a worshipper of Siva, a follower of the doctrine of Advaita.

samadhi: a state of thoughtless meditation or absorption in Divine Bliss.

sanatana dharma: eternal doctrine, the name commonly used for Hinduism.

sattva: the quality or guna of purity and aspiration.

Shakta: a worshipper of the Shakti (which see).

Shakti: the Divine Energy regarded as the female manifestation of God.

Siva: God as the Destroyer of ignorance and ego, God as worshipped by the Advaitin.

sunyata: the Void or Emptiness in Buddhist doctrine.

swarupa: man's true state, Nirvana.

tamas: the quality or guna of ignorance, darkness and degeneracy, the downward tendency.

Tathagata: He who has achieved, an epithet of the Buddha.

Vaishnavite: worshipper of God as Vishnu.

vasana: tendency or inclination.

Vishnu: God as the Preserver, God as worshipped by the dualist.

yuga: one of the four ages into which the manvantara is divided, equivalent to the Western ages of gold, silver, bronze and iron.

Index

A

- Advaita*, essence of Hinduism, 40 ff;
and Divine Guidance, 77; Christian failure to recognize, 142
Akbar, 51
Alara Kalama and Buddhist doctrine, 106-8
alchemy, 91
Alexander the Great, 19, 150
Ananda, compared to St. John, 16; instructions to, 74, 110
animism, 70
Aquinas, St. Thomas, 127, 131
Ashoka, Buddhism in the time of, 11
Athanasius, St., 139
Atmabodha, 44
Augustine, St., 131, 139
Avadhuta Gita, 46
Avatar of Vishnu, 48, 83 ff; Seventh, 49; Eighth, 49; Ninth, 84; Tenth, 86, 154

B

- Bhagavad Gita, 39, 41, 42, 45, 47;
Gospel of Sri Krishna, 49;
quoted, 53, 54, 62, 104, 129, 138
Bhagavata, 49, 52
Bhave, Vinoba, 138
Bodhisattva, 35; doctrine of, 113, 115, 141
Boehme, Jacob, 126, 133
Brahman, the Absolute, 67
Buddha as divine founder, 9; birth

stories, 12; admits lower castes, 16; discourages miracles, 16; language spoken by, 24; choice of worldly or spiritual power, 25; refusal to answer questions, 56 ff; forbade worship, 74; the Ninth Avatar, 84; and Hindu doctrine, 105 ff

Buddhism, first proselytising religion, 17; Eastern religion, 19, 73-4; world-renouncing religion, 25; Chinese influence on, 29; non-theistic, 60; advaitic, 73, 94; doctrine of anatta, 94, 104; Four Noble Truths and Noble Eightfold Path, 104, 119 ff; and heavens and hells, 109

Budisat, 145

Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress*, 130

C

celibacy, 29 ff

Chandogya Upanishad, 41

Christ as divine founder, 9; birth stories, 12; and Aramaic, 24; choice of worldly or spiritual power, 25; as Vishnu, 65; the Ninth Avatar, 84; as Redeemer, 119; the Way, 138; the Only Son, 138; and Krishna, 139

Christianity, and Judaism, 18; and persecution, 19; a Western religion, 19, 73-4; world-renouncing religion, 25, and Imperial

Christianity—*contd.*

- Rome, 26 ff; mediation of priests, 31; and a secular state, 37; monotheistic, 60; devotional, 73; doctrine of the Fall and Redemption, 81; dualistic, 117; contrasted with Buddhist doctrine, 117, 141 ff
Cloud of Unknowing, The, 32, 124, 134, 139, 143
 Confucianism, non-theistic, 60
 Coomaraswamy, Ananda, 106-8

D

- Dakshinamurthi, 62
 Dante, 132
 Devadatta, compared to Judas, 16
Diamond Sutra, 35, 113
 Dionysius, *Divine Names*, 124, 127
 Don Quixote, 135

E

- Eckhart, 74, 76, 105, 118, 132, 133
 Emerson, 150
 Essenes, 69

F

- Fraser, Sir J. G., *The Golden Bough*, 149

G

- Gandhi, M. K., *An Autobiography*, 147-8
 Gaudapada's *Karika* to the *Mandukya Upanishad*, 143
 Goddard, Dwight, 27, 29, 36, 114
 Guénon, René, 81, 149
 Gundry, D. W., 87

H

- Harding, M. E., *Journey into Self*, 130
 henotheism, 62, 70

- Hermes, compared to Christ, 14
 Hermetism, 132
 Hinduism, *sanatana dharma*, 9, 39, 89; darshans, not sects, 40; Advaita, 40 ff; philosophy of, 52 ff; and polytheism, 59 ff; and the Personal God, 64 ff; doctrine of Shakti, 65 ff; mythology, 67; *svarupa*, 97

I

- Incredible Sai Baba, The*, 98
 Ishwara, the Personal God, 64
 Islam, third proselytising religion, 22; world-sanctifying religion, 24; monotheistic, 60; devotional, 73

J

- James, Prof. E. O., 61
 Jataka Tales, 110
Jivan-Mukti, equivalent to Arahant, 141
 John, St., compared to Ananda, 16
 John, St., of the Cross, *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, 123
 Jones, Sir William, 149
 Judaism, monotheistic, 60; devotional, 73
 Judas, 16
 Jung, C. G., 91, 130

K

- Kala Devala and the infant Buddha, 15
 Kali, Shakti of Siva, 65
kali yuga, 119
kalpa, 80
 Kassapa, compared to St. Peter, 17
 Kipling, Rudyard, 147, 150
 Krishna, birth stories, 12; Eighth Avatar, 49; and Gopis and Radha, 49; and devotees, 50; revelation to Arjuna, 62; as Vishnu, 65, 70

M

- Mahayana, doctrine of compassion, 35; doctrine of Bodhisattva, 113
 Mahdi, 154
 Maitreya Buddha, Tenth Avatar, 155
manvantara, 80 ff, 86, 154
 Mary and Martha as contemplative and active types, 32
 Maya, mother of Buddha, 13; compared to Maia, 14
 Megasthenes, 19
 Mira Bai, 50
 Mohammad, 9
 Moksha, the same as Nirvana, 45, 98
 monasticism, 29
 monophysite heresy, 141
 monotheism discussed, 59 ff
 Morgan, K. W., 101, 103
 Mt. Meru, 67
 Müller, Max, 62, 70, 149
 Muruganar, 111

N

- Nalaka, 15
 Nanda, 112
 neo-Platonists, 69
 Nestorian Church, 20
 Nicene Creed, 141
 Nirvana, 45, 75, 90, 94 ff, 108, 128, 129, 133, 136, 141
 non-theism discussed, 59 ff

P

- Parsis, origin of, 23
 Paul, St., turned back from the East, 20; dispute with St. Peter, 21; reference to heavens, 132
 Personal God in Hinduism, 46-8, 52, 55; Ishwara, 64; in Christianity, 125
 Peter, St., compared with Kassapa, 17; dispute with St. Paul, 21
 Plato, 69
 progress in religion, 87 ff

- Psyche and Eros, myth, 69
 purgatory, doctrine of, 131
 Pythagoreanism, 69

Q

- Quran, 48

R

- Rahula, 25
 Rama, a king, 26; Seventh Avatar, 49; as Vishnu, 65
 Ramakrishna, 52, 57, 63, 65, 67, 99
 Ramana Maharshi, 40, 48, 55, 56, 58, 61, 62, 104, 107, 108, 111, 116, 142
Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge, 63, 75
 Ramayana, 49
 Ramdas, Swami, 48
 Renou, 61
 Rhys Davids, 149
Rhythm of History, The, 38
 Ruysbroeck, 126

S

- Sai Baba, 98
samadhi, 107, 122
 Shankaracharya, 47, 129
 Siva, God for Advaitins, 63 ff; in mythology, 67, 111
 Socrates, 69
 Suzuki, D. T., 76
 Syrian Church, 20

T

- Tao-Te-King, 29, 57
 Taoism, non-theistic, 60; advaitic, 73
 Thayumanavar, 46
Theologica Germanica, 119, 120, 122, 124, 125, 126, 133, 139
 Thomas, St., apostle to India, 20

Tukaram, 59
Tulsidas, 49

W

Wahhabi, sect, 35
Weil, Simone, 14, 70, 138

U

Upanishads, 39, 141

X

V

Xavier, St. Francis, 146

varanas, 108

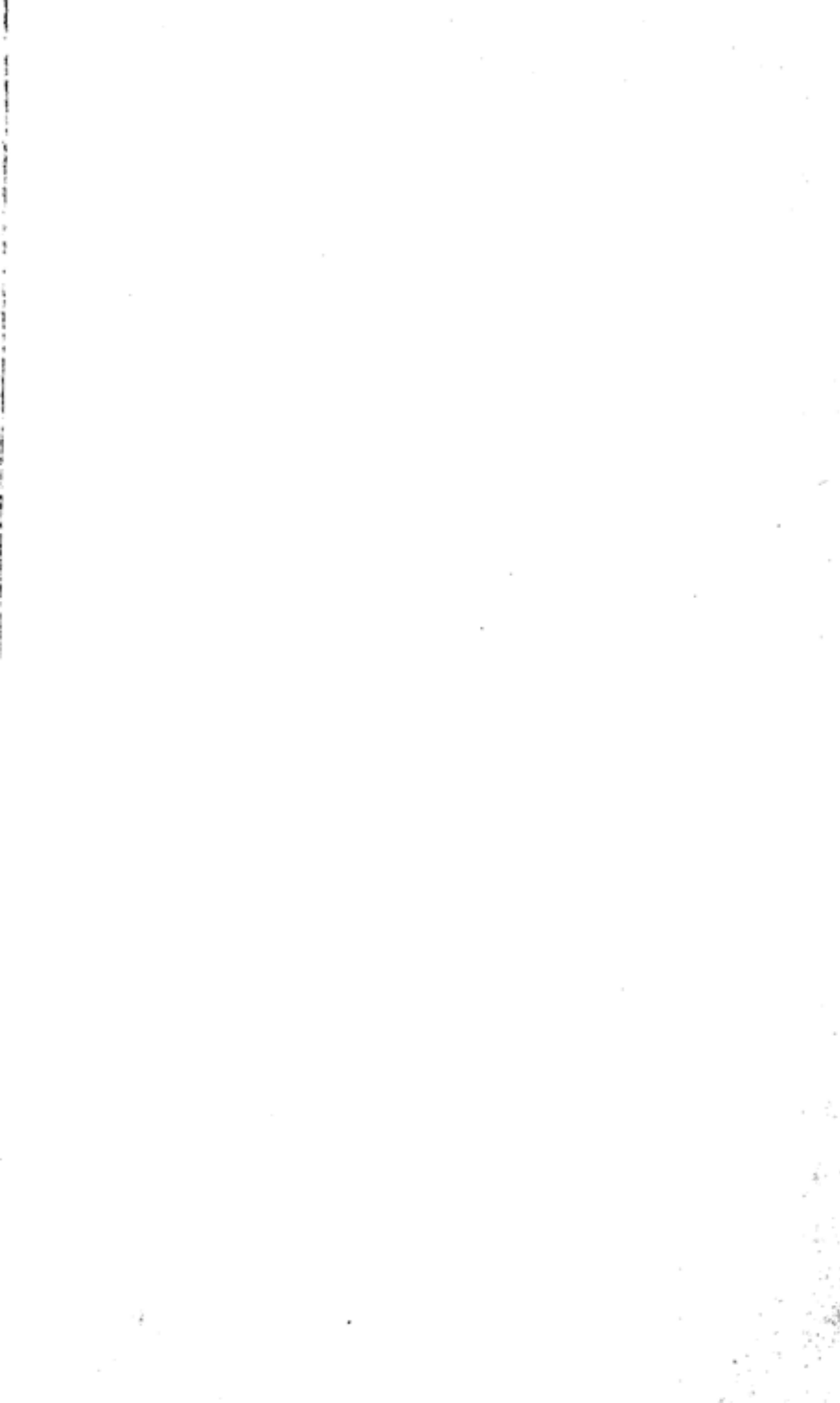
Vedas, 39, 62

Veddas of Ceylon, 87

Vishnu, the Preserver, 48; God for
the dualist, 63 *ff*; in mythology, 68 *yuga*, 82

Y





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